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interzone/10

NEW STORIES BY SCOTT BRADFIELD, RACHEL POLLACK AND GENE WOLFE

PLUS JOHN'S RETURN TO LIVERPOOL ...

AND MORE

interzone

No 10 Winter 1984/85

EDITORIAL

At the end of our second year, as at the end of our first, we sent questionnaires to those subscribers who were due to renew. This year we received 140 replies. As well as inviting general comments, we asked readers to tell us which stories they particularly liked or disliked during the year (that is, in issues 5 to 8). We compiled the following list by subtracting the negative mentions from the positive ones. The resulting ratings for each story are given in brackets and the stories are listed in descending order of popularity:

1) "The Unconquered Country" by Geoff Ryman (57)
2) "The Tithonian Factor" by Richard Cowper (36)
3) "Unmistakably the Finest" by Scott Bradfield (23)
   "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts (23)
5) "Strange Memories of Death" by Philip K. Dick (20)
6) "Novelty" by John Crowley (17)
7) "Strange Great Sins" by M. John Harrison (14)
8) "The *Flash!* Kid" by Scott Bradfield (13)
   "What Cindy Saw" by John Shirley (13)
10) "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder (9)
11) "Dreamers" by Kim Newman (8)
12) "The Views of Mohammed El Hassif" by John Hendry (7)
13) "What I Believe" by J.G. Ballard (5)
    "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson (5)
    "McGonagall's Lear" by Andy Soutter (5)
    "Life in the Mechanist/Shaper Era" by Bruce Sterling (5)
17) "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos (2)
18) "Experiment With Time" by Maria Fitzgerald (–7)
19) "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration" by Michael Blumlein (–12)

Some readers questioned whether this exercise was a good idea. "If you tailor the content of *IZ* to the readership, it will cease to be the magazine I enjoy" wrote Keith Marsland, and I can understand his concern. If we deliberately courted popularity and followed this policy to its logical conclusion, the magazine would contain mainly stories about disinherited princes in pseudo-mediaeval fantasy lands. We don't want that either. We want to produce the kind of magazine we would like to read ourselves, and we want to attract the kind of readership who share our diverse tastes. In this regard, it's encouraging to see that our own favourite story of the year, Geoff Ryman's "The Unconquered Country", has emerged as the most popular story among our readers. We were pleased to be able to bring it to you. There will be a new story by Geoff Ryman in our forthcoming paperback anthology, of which more details appear in this issue's news section.

We were also pleased to bring you Michael Blumlein's "Tissue Ablation and Variant Regeneration", the story which ended up at the bottom of the pile. Had we compiled the list using positive mentions only, "Tissue Ablation" would have finished in sixth position. It was a story which attracted a lot of comments, both good and bad: a response which we consider preferable to apathy. We are sorry to have disgusted some readers but happy to have stimulated others; "Tissue Ablation" was a harrowing but original story, which might not have seen publication if *Interzone* did not exist. We will always be ready to include such stories, though the majority of what we publish will continue to be more traditional in form. Frequently the stories will be optimistic, even life-affirming; one hopes, too, they will be as thought-provoking as Blumlein's piece.

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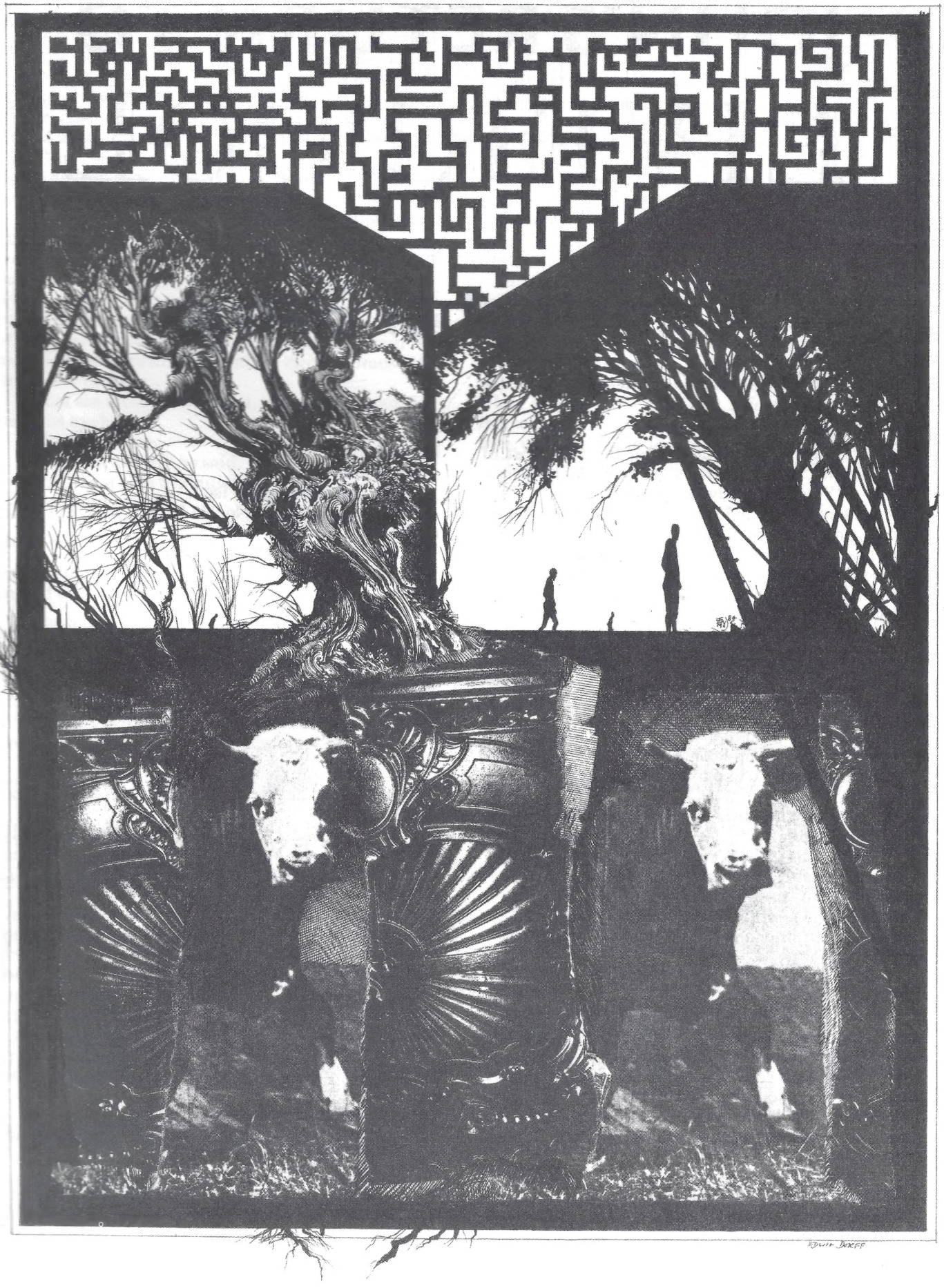

EDWIN JOSEF

JOHN'S RETURN TO LIVERPOOL

Christopher Burns

He came to the door during the first frost of winter. Straight away she knew who he was.

"You've come back," she said.

In the streetlight he looked bloodless. Behind him frost began to settle on the grass and blind the windows of parked cars. Children in heavy boots careered between the houses, turned corners sharply, yelled to each other through the drifting cold.

His hair was damp and his nose was thinner than it should have been. She thought of how she'd read that sniffing cocaine destroys the bridges, then felt guilty that such a small thing should have crossed her mind. It was nothing compared to the magnitude of his return.

His skin was waxen, as if it had been newly laid across the bones. "Can I come in?" he asked simply.

She didn't feel she had to say anything.

He sat down beside the coal fire but kept on his thick blue coat. Its shoulders sparkled with frost. His glasses misted up with the temperature change and he unhooked them from his ears, cleaning them absentmindedly with a handkerchief. They were the familiar round frames. She noticed his hands were thinner and bonier than she remembered or expected.

"You've lost a lot of weight," she said quietly.

He nodded.

Dorothy got down on her knees in front of him and looked straight into his eyes. Without the glasses they seemed shortsighted and introspective. "The pounds have dropped off you," she said, "you can tell just by looking at you. Your face is a lot thinner than it was. You were quite beefy when I knew you. There are lines under your eyes and your nose is so thin it looks like a blade."

"I was too fat a lot of the time in the early days." Despite all the years his voice was still flat and nasal.

"That may be, but now you're much too thin. I used to think that, you know. All that macrobiotic food isn't for you."

He smiled.

"John, you need a good feed."

He shook his head. "No. No food. I can't. But I still need sleep."

"Are you tired now?"

"I get tired very quickly. It's as if everything has drained away. All those energy levels just aren't there anymore."

"They'll come back," she said comfortingly. The firelight danced in his eyes. "You can have the spare bed. But first you must have a hot bath. The fire's been on all day so there's plenty of hot water. Don't argue, you need to get the cold out of your bones. It's been a long time, John."

"More than twenty years."

"I'm pleased you remembered me. Honoured."

"I was never any good at keeping in touch. You know that."

"A lot happened. I got married." He looked suddenly uncertain, and she laughed. "Don't worry, it finished long ago. All I have left of him are a few photographs, some of his clothes and an old wedding certificate." Suddenly she felt tears at the corners of her eyes. They were so sharp they stung her and she shook her head in disbelief. "I still can't believe it's you."

"Oh, it's me all right. No doubt about it. Flesh and blood." He extended his hands and she grasped them, feeling the skin and the bones. She moved her fingers round until she could feel the slow pulse in his wrists.

She couldn't hold back the tears. They slid down her face. "You knew that if you ever wanted me I'd be here."

He nodded slowly, as if preoccupied.

She sniffed (she thought it sounded horrible) and said firmly "*Bath*."

"All right. Whatever you say. If I can stay . . ."

"Of *course* you're staying. For as long as you want. Now come on. You look as if you haven't been warm for days and your hair's in bad need of a wash."

For that moment his eyes looked uncomprehending.
"I'm not giving you a choice, John."
"Okay."

She ran the bath until the room was full of steam and dappled glass. He stood and let her undress him, making no protest, as silent as a patient. In the bath his feet stuck out of the water and she placed them on either side of the chrome taps. She washed his hair several times, relathering it, feeling it become cleaner beneath her fingers. She left him soaking while she washed his clothes. They had expensive labels but felt as if he'd been sleeping rough in them. She left the bathroom door open in case, in a trance with the heat, he slipped beneath the water.

When she dried him he felt warmer, healthier, more human. The water that dripped from his hair was warm. He even began to smile. He stood there, still pale but a little more pink, while she rubbed him dry with a thick white towel. She felt the ribs, the muscle wall, the relaxed skin of his genitals, the slow thump of the heart. It was then that she asked him about the marks. They were distinct pinkish circles, almost like immature nipples.

"What are these?" she asked, trying not to sound as nervous as she felt.

He looked down.

"You must know," he said.

"Are they where the bullets hit?"

He nodded.

She tried to be calm, as calm as she could. "John," she asked, "are you dead?"

He laughed. He pushed his hair back with one hand. "Of course I'm dead," he said, "can't you tell? Don't you believe what you read in the papers?"

Later John sat in her husband's dressing gown in front of the fire. He stared into its flames, watching the black coal burning. He seemed content.

When he slept his hair fell across his eyes in a fine swath, making him look almost boyish. She pushed it gently back from his eyelids with her fingertips. He drew the blankets tightly about him like a child.

That night while he slept Dorothy filled his room with mementos of his life—posters, records, fan magazines, old photographs, a couple of books, a guitar with his name scrawled across it. Then she lay in bed, with a warm tide of fulfilment and trust flowing through her. She stayed awake like a guardian, and thought of him waking like a child at Christmas, lost in wonder at the Aladdin's cave of his own past.

He was already awake when she looked in. He sat by the bed in her husband's broadly striped pyjamas. He picked through the collection, never dwelling for long on anything, but sometimes smiling and sometimes looking puzzled at this accumulation of evidence. Later she brought out the photograph album and together they looked at the pictures.

"You must have been our first fan," John said.

"I never claimed that."

"Didn't you? But you were always there. I remember we all liked to see you. You gave us a sense of security."

"I remember I felt quite possessive about you. When you started to make it big I thought you were being stolen by others. Firstly girls from Liverpool, then Hamburg, London—"

"Tomorrow the world," he said, and the cutting edge was in his voice. "Where was this taken?"

"Don't you recognise Matthew Street?"

"Christ. Yes."

"Do you know everyone on it?"

"That's me. And you, and that girl who used to sometimes come with you. With Pete Best, George. That's Ringo when he was with Rory Storm. That's Rory's girlfriend. This must have been just after Stu died."

"Not long. We were all terribly upset about that."

He put his hand up to his face and spread his fingers in an unexpectedly feminine motion.

"We wanted Paul on the photo but it all got a bit chaotic," she laughed. "He came back to line up the camera with me and I took this by mistake. I just pressed the shutter too soon. And it was the end of the film."

He tilted his head back and laughed. She could see hollows at the base of his neck. "Look," he said, "I can remember a lot about those days. All of a sudden."

They reminisced about the old days. About old songs, places, friends. Endless loves that had lasted a few days, wild ambitions that were never airborne; a time when all the future had lain before them. John was relaxed and amusing, telling tall stories, most of them true, with all his old flair for pithiness and zest.

"Come on," she said finally, "it's time you ate."

He shook his head.

"It must be twelve hours since you arrived," she said, "and you haven't eaten or drunk a thing. You must *try*."

"No," he said, "leave it."

She left it a moment and then said "It'll do you good to have a meal."

"Don't let me stop you," he said.

So she ate on her own.

Later she dressed him in a pair of jeans and a black sweater. They were both slightly too big for him. "His shoes will be a size too large, as well," she mused. "Maybe we could find some really thick socks so they won't be too uncomfortable."

"You know I'll have to revisit the old places."

She nodded. "I knew they could never kill you," she said. "I knew you'd come back."

He thought about this for a long time. "I always knew it was possible," he said at last. "We thought about it a lot."

"What happened? What *really* happened?"

"He got me all right. You go through life tensed up for the unexpected, and when it happens . . ."

He gripped her arm. She felt her limb go numb the grip was so tight.

"You mustn't tell anyone," he said. There was urgency and a slight bitterness in his voice.

She shook her head, mute.

"I mean it," he said, and all the old menace and unpredictability were there. "No-one must ever know."

"I swear it."

"No-one."

"My arm hurts."

He let go of her. "Sorry," he said.

Within a few days he was leaving her for several hours, slipping out of the house at dusk with a turned-up coat collar and a pulled-down

hat. Sometimes when he returned he would tell her where he had been—to where his mother lived, or Aunt Mimi's old house, or Penny Lane, or Matthew Street, or Strawberry Fields. Sometimes he said nothing, but stared into the fire, red light edging his face. She would pretend to watch the television but all the time keep her eyes on him. He still had not eaten, and she was becoming increasing concerned. She once suggested calling a doctor and he was mercilessly sarcastic to her, asking did she not know that a doctor could do nothing for the dead—only angels and undertakers were of any use to the dead.

So she had rich, hot, heavy-smelling meals prepared for herself, hoping that they would somehow trigger hunger in him. But he remained indifferent, and all the time got thinner.

And although at times he was his old charming self, he often drifted away into silence and introspection, gazing for long periods at nothing. In this relaxed, almost exhausted posture he looked like a man recuperating, lost between ordeals, resting between battles. It was then that he became a stranger, a foreigner in his own land, unwilling or unable to grasp the everyday event. He had no trouble in refusing to answer her.

Over the next few days he offered her four versions of the afterlife. She only asked him about it once but he could not let the matter rest. When he described them there was an edge to his voice. He was like a man betrayed, cheated out of his inheritance.

In the first of these he told her of an afterlife like a children's heaven. There he would meet again all those he had loved, including the famous Julia, his mother. "She's there all right," he said, eyes glittering, "it's just the way you think it should be. All your friends, all your relations. It's like one big, endless, happy childhood. Like soft, neverending protection. The lion lies down with the lamb."

The second was a rock'n'roll heaven. "They're all up there," he said, moving his hand in a slow arc and looking up at the ceiling. He was like a parody preacher. "Presley, Hendrix, Holly. They make music too great for mortal ears. And the girls are always beautiful and always available." He stared directly at her, daring her to take him seriously.

A third version, the Eastern version, spoke of cycles of incarnation, of moments of insight between death and birth during which one saw with a clarity that Earth could never match. Life was an ascent or descent through stages of self-knowledge. One plunged down the spiral towards the senseless and inanimate or crawled up it towards the angels.

"And you?" Dorothy asked.

He sneered. "Why," he said, "I've always known where I was going. To the toppermost of the poppermost." It was the half-dismissive, half-serious phrase he'd used to cajole and encourage the others when they'd been struggling in Hamburg and Liverpool.

But John also offered the possibility of a fourth kind of afterlife. This was a spiritual existence, the survival of the mind without the body in a nexus of consciousness. Identities were individual and yet inseparable from the connections which passed through them. They were pulses in the eternal mind.

"And you've been part of this?"

Suddenly, without warning, he looked stricken and fearful. "I don't know," he whispered. She put her arms round him and he buried his head in her bosom. After a few minutes he had recovered.

Of course, she speculated about a fifth version. The dead returned to their old homes, haunting them, were restless and unsatisfied spirits until something finally laid them to rest. But he always felt so real in her arms.

"Come on," she said to him, "you're all right, John. You're here with me. You're *safe*."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course. I know so."

"None of it's true, Dorothy."

"What? What isn't?"

His eyes were startling and honest, his cheeks thin. His hands looked large on the end of stick-like arms. "It's oblivion, you know," he said, matter-of-fact, "everything just sputters to an end, the body systems close down, consciousness just folds in on itself. There's no light, no dark, nothing. It's oblivion. Nothing. For ever."

She shook her head.

"A dying man's life comes to him in the few moments before the end," he said bitterly. "And that's it. You go into death fooling yourself. Our only talent is self-deception."

That night Dorothy sat and watched television. John was already asleep; his periods of rest were getting longer and longer. Now it was common for him to sleep the clock round. Sometimes when the winter sun set she would ask him if he was going out; he'd shake his head and say he was tired.

She sat with a coffee and watched a soap opera, the news, and a documentary about medicine. In the documentary a doctor discussed the nature of the self. One's feelings were located in the self, he said, and that was paradoxical, for the self was unlocatable. Nobody knew where it was. As an illustration he showed amputees who still experienced sensations in limbs that were no longer there. When something vital is removed, the doctor said, the self creates an alternative —and it is too simple to say that this creation is fictitious. To the self, it is real.

"You've hardly changed at all," he said to her the next day.

"Haven't I?" She was flattered but surprised.

"You're just like you were all those years ago." He seemed bemused by this.

She laughed. "It's nice of you to say so, but it's not really true."

"It is. You even have the same figure. Girlish—that's the word. People change over the years. Look at me. But you, you're no different. You look twenty-five years younger than me. Why, you even wear the same kind of clothes as you did then."

"I *don't*."

He nodded. It was slow. "You'd think you were still there, Dorothy. All around me it still belongs to the early sixties. There's only me that's different."

He shuddered. It was a spasm that ran through him, and he hugged his arms to himself to control it.

"I'm outside the time capsule," he said.

Dorothy stood up and looked at herself in the mirror. Afternoon light made her face white. She bent close to the glass. There were broadening strands of grey in her hair, webbings of lines at her eyes and mouth, and she

knew if she pulled down the collar of her blouse she would find the beginnings of a scrawniness at the base of her neck.

John's fingers traced his chest until they found, beneath his clothes, the site of one of the bullets. He spread his hands over the area, pushed the flesh together. He was like a young girl discovering the beginnings of a breast.

"Dorothy."

"Yes?"

"I'm dying. I know it."

"You're not, you're *not*."

"I know it. I've been thinking stupid things, thinking that I'd survived it. I thought that somehow this was all true, that it was real, that I'd been given some kind of guarantee." He tilted his head downward. His hair fell forward. When he spoke again his voice was strained and unstable. "Because I can reach out and touch things, because I can touch you, I thought that was proof." He put his hands up to his face.

"John?"

When he looked up again the lower rims of his glasses had caught tears. They spilled out of the sides as he lifted his head. His voice shook. "It scares me," he said, "I'm terrified."

Once more she had to comfort him. She could feel his bones beneath the skin. There was so little flesh on him now she felt as if she were comforting a hunger victim.

"I'm tired," he whispered.

Even though it was only mid-afternoon she decided to put him to bed. He looked drained and ill, and she had to steady him as he walked to the bedroom. She helped him undress. He insisted that he did not have the strength to get into any pyjamas so she humoured him and let him get into bed naked.

He lay and cried while she sat beside him and held his hand and dried his eyes. Eventually the grief seemed to exhaust him, and he quietened and then slipped into unconsciousness. She sat with him for a while. He still sniffed and trembled a little in his sleep, but gradually, as he slept more deeply, the distress left him.

Dorothy went back to the mirror, took off her clothes and stood in front of it. She studied herself for several minutes. The light was cruel to her. There was no mistaking her age.

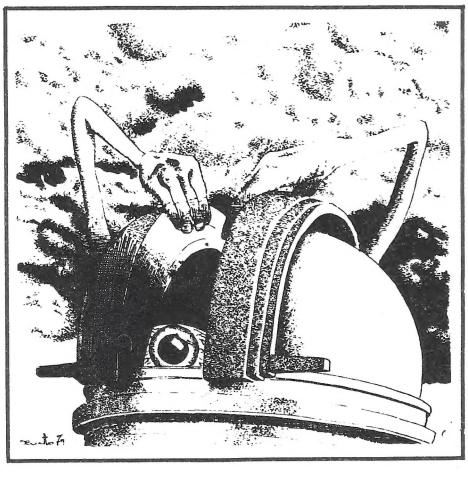
As she watched herself a feeling of unreality swept through her, loosening her understanding, releasing her grip. She felt floating, unresolved, half-imagined. It was a sickeningly dreamlike sensation, as if she belonged to something or someone else.

Weakened, she went back into the bedroom.

John lay beneath the sheets. He was quiet, still; his head was tilted back and his arms were down by his sides. His eyes were closed.

She lifted the sheets and slipped into bed beside him. He was cold. She wrapped herself around him, hoping that the heat of her body would warm him. He hardly moved. She could feel the slow pulse of his

SCIENCE FICTION: An inside view



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heart, the shallow peace of his light breathing.

Her fingers searched him until they touched the small round mark of a bullet. She ran her fingertips around it, touching it lightly, gently. After a while, like a newborn animal returning to its mother's teat, found the wound with her mouth, and fastened her lips around it.

She lay there quietly, waiting for the night.

Christopher Burns is a "nearly new" writer — he has had work published previously in the *London Review of Books* and in two *New Stories* anthologies from Hutchinson. "John's Return to Liverpool" is his first story for *Interzone*, and we shall be featuring a second, "Fogged Plates," in our next issue. Mr Burns is married, has two children, and lives in Cumbria.

continued from page 2

One other subject attracted the same high level of impassioned response as "Tissue Ablation", namely the editorial about radical "hard" sf in *IZ* 8. Many readers wrote to support us in our quest for a new kind of technology-orientated fiction, while others wrote to deplore what they saw as our imminent transition into a British equivalent of *Analog*. We tried to clarify matters last issue, but in view of the widespread concern it seems worthwhile emphasising that we do not intend *IZ* to take "a new direction" (as one concerned correspondent put it); we intend to augment the current spectrum of writing in the magazine, not replace it. Several readers said they like the *variety* of fiction we publish; this variety will continue. Andrew J. Wilson wrote: "The element of surprise seems important to me. I enjoy opening a new issue and not knowing till then what I will find there. The last thing *IZ* needs is a formula — is it really the kind of magazine whose contents should be so readily predictable?" To which I can only answer "No". An element of surprise seems vital for a magazine of imaginative fiction, and I'm glad that we're managing to provide it. Along with the various kinds of fiction we're already publishing, radical "hard" sf should add to the surprise and unpredictability. We just hope that some of you can come up with the goods. As society struggles to adapt to new technology, surely fiction should try to do the same. Where, if not in *Interzone*, could such fiction evolve? Don't forget — the radical "hard" sf competition is open for entries until 31st December 1984.

General comments on the magazine were mainly favourable: most people think we're continuing to improve, and becoming more of a magazine than just a collection of stories. The fiction has always been, and will continue to be, our primary concern, but *IZ* is also evolving, we hope, into an accessible forum for comment and the exchange of ideas. We now have a regular letters page, and our reviews have been augmented by Mary Gentle's column, which has been well received. Starting with this issue, we're introducing a news column, edited by Abigail Frost, who will also be commissioning occasional non-fiction features.

The amount of artwork in *IZ* has increased over the last year, apparently to the approval of most people. Our attempts to fuse words with the pictures in special art features have generally been poorly received, but the artwork itself has fared better, with Ian Miller's work (especially his cover for No. 7) proving particularly popular.

The annual renewal of a large number of subscriptions provides an ideal opportunity to solicit feedback, but we're *always* looking for comments on the magazine, so if you weren't sent a questionnaire, please don't hesitate to write in and tell us what *you* think.

Observant readers will have noticed that our masthead has undergone yet another alteration this issue, this time growing in size rather than shrinking. As I've already mentioned, Abigail Frost is now our News Editor, while John Clute, Alan Dorey, and the returning Roz Kaveney become Advisory Editors. We also welcome newcomers Judith Hanna and Lin Morris, who join Paul Annis and Andy Robertson as Assistant Editors, and there are brief biographies of Judith and Lin in the news section.

Simon Ounsley

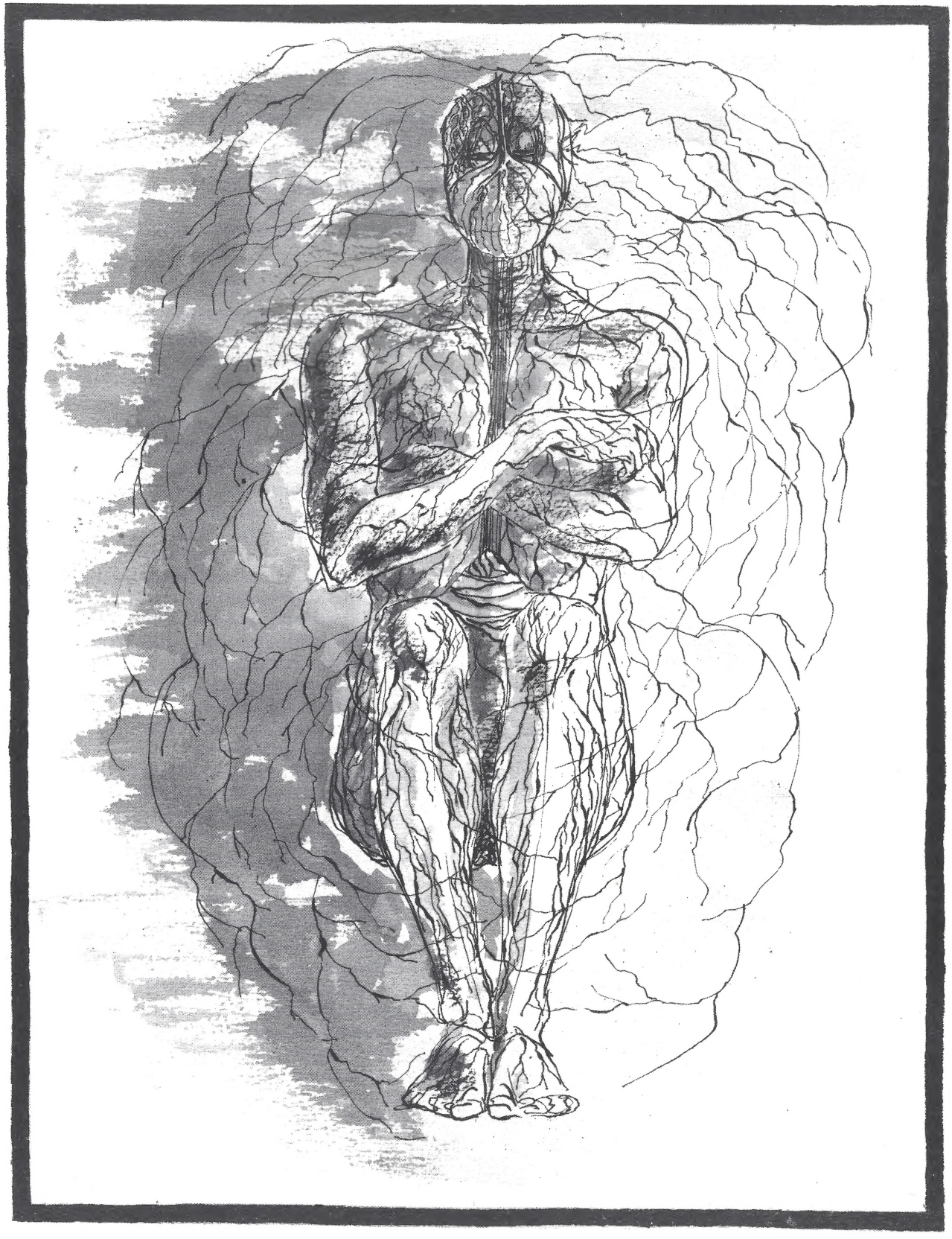
BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* from No. 1 (Spring 1982) are still available from 21 The Village Street, Leeds, LS4 2PR — although supplies of some numbers are now running low. They are £1.50 each, but readers who buy three or more issues may have them at £1.25 each. (£1.75 each overseas, or £1.50 each for three.) Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of back issues:

IZ 1 — M. John Harrison, John Sladek, Angela Carter, Keith Roberts, Michael Moorcock
IZ 2 — J.G. Ballard, Alex Stewart, Andrew Weiner, Rachel Pollack, Thomas M. Disch
IZ 3 — Garry Kilworth, Angela Carter, Josephine Saxton, Nicholas Allan, David S. Garnett
IZ 4 — John Sladek, Alex Stewart, David Redd, Malcolm Edwards, Andy Soutter, Barrington J. Bayley
IZ 5 — Scott Bradfield, Richard Cowper, John Crowley, John Shirley, M. John Harrison
IZ 6 — Cherry Wilder, Neil Ferguson, John Hendry, Lorraine Sintetos, Keith Roberts, plus illustrated feature by Roger Dean.
IZ 7 — Geoff Ryman, Bruce Sterling, Michael Blumlein, plus "comic strip" by Margaret Welbank.
IZ 8 — Scott Bradfield, Kim Newman, Philip K. Dick, Maria Fitzgerald, Andy Soutter, J.G. Ballard.
IZ 9 — J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, Thomas M. Disch, M. John Harrison, William Gibson, Garry Kilworth.

GREEN HEARTS

LEE MONTGOMERIE



Illustrated by Amanda Shields

When I can no longer bear the cramped tunnels of the colony and my mother's accusing presence (like billions of mothers before her, she cannot understand, she says, how her own daughter has changed overnight into this awkward, defiant and irascible creature), I often volunteer to go topside to check the terraforming project.

Weltering in pubescent irritability, I stumble in my heavy suit through the invisible bloom of lichens, amoebae and bacteria that suffuses the blushing sands, occasionally taking a sample for analysis. I oil the yellow robots that roam the red dunes.

Sometimes I pass the mirror dome in which Bionics Interplanetary are working on their secret project. It winks at me. My reflective suit winks back.

I wonder how Beanshoot is getting on.

The colonists have long since lost interest in the events which momentarily disturbed our smug autonomy, but the strange arrival of BI's protegé still haunts me like an enigmatic dream.

I was in the infirmary for psychiatric assessment at the time.

On one of my mother's infrequent visits, she was suddenly vibrant with anger. "Bionics Interplanetary have returned!" A fleet of ships bearing the green heart logo had arrived unannounced, disgorging huge quantities of equipment.

"A dome is being constructed in the desert," she told me on her next visit. The team refused to discuss their mission. Their communications personnel had taken over our radio tower, incessantly sending scrambled messages to some ship which was imminently expected.

"Intelligent alien emissaries from another system?" I heard the hospital staff conjecturing. They had been told nothing. Although the terraforming project, the colony's raison d'etre, was an official BI enterprise, most of the colonists had come to Mars to get away from Bionics Interplanetary and the damage they had done. My mother never tired of telling me that she had kept me frozen as an embryo for years; had smuggled me to the colony as an undetected pregnancy because Earth had been no place to bring up a child.

Lying in the hospital, I heard the anticipated ship landing. It was an ancient rusty tub, I was told later, from which stepped a half-dozen ageing agoraphobic astronauts, forgotten survivors of some nationalistic showpiece expedition of the pre-Bionic age. They stood blinking and confused on the tarmac while the BI delegation heedlessly shouldered past them, manipulated a large metallic canister from the hold, loaded it into a waiting ambulance and rushed it, lights flashing and sirens screaming, through the tunnels to the hospital.

An anxious BI medical team had been bustling around my ward all day, tensely erecting resuscitation equipment, when the container arrived, accompanied by all the rest of the visitors in a state of extreme nervousness. The Chief Technician was panicking, her fingers fumbling with the unfamiliar clasps, foul-smelling liquid slopping on the floor. At last she prised the crate apart to reveal a man-size, peeling foetus floating in a pool of fluid filled with sloughed skin and moulted hair.

The hospital staff crowded round. "What *is* it?" they asked. They recognised the container as the type that would have been used for transporting large extra-terrestrial lifeforms, had any ever been found, but they did not recognise the etiolated creature with the hideous gasmask head as a human being.

The respirator came off to reveal a grey, gluey, unconscious face under a bald, veined skull. He was not breathing. The BI team were struggling to insert him into the resuscitation apparatus and the frail creature was blue and writhing, rolling blank eyes and racking his birdcage ribcage. At last he groaned and gasped and flushed and stabilised, and the BI people relaxed, embraced each other in an ecstasy of self-congratulation, and rushed off to organise a briefing conference.

I called my new companion Beanshoot. A can of these pale, embryonic delicacies had once found its way into our supplies. Beanshoot was to lie, helpless and pampered as a newborn, in the bed opposite mine until the establishment under the dome could be completed.

My mother was suddenly a constant visitor.

"Imagine," she said, whispering excitedly as if that thing foggily groping and gurgling in the bed across the ward could understand human speech, "that boy is Nole Whard's legal heir! He is probably the richest person in the known universe!" And she looked at Beanshoot with a considerably more fascinated species of disgust than she had before the briefing conference — when she had averted her eyes in contempt from the huge, lolling head mindlessly dribbling synthetic milk all over the BI Chief Technician's biotechnical smock.

"I heard that his survival has been touch and go," she confided. One could not really blame the astronauts. They had left Earth in the pre-Bionic age, had been shocked to find on their return journey a bacterial jungle on Ganymede where at the time of their outward journey not the simplest amino acid had condensed on the icy rocks. More shocked still to discover in the midst of this multicoloured riot, a crashed lifeboat inscribed *SS Titanic*.

Carefully penetrating the airlock, they had searched the tiny capsule, filled with wild hydroponics, for hours before they noticed the naked adolescent, immobile, not bothering to watch them from among the overgrown tomatoes and grapes.

They had never heard of the *Titanic*. Even after their computer had translated the documents, the name Nole Whard had meant nothing to them. Some incomprehensible human man had lived alone on this airless moon, had given birth to a son and then had carefully ventured out into the vacuum by converting himself, cell by cell, into an anaerobic nerve net. Their landing and take-off jets had inadvertently destroyed the delicate intelligent web that guarded the mysterious boy.

They had carried Beanshoot unresisting to their craft but he would not eat, neglected to look at them and seemed unbearably distressed by his non-organic surroundings. Sharing their confined ship with an unresponsive, incontinent, cringing youth was soon unbearable for the astronauts too. They had decided to suspend him until they could get help.

Now, revived by what is called a miracle, he lies opposite me until the complex is completed and the BI team gently pack him in a transparent pressurised coffin and carry him away from the colony, never to return. The astronauts go back to an Earth changed beyond recognition. The hospital finds nothing seriously wrong with me.

"Impossible," my mother insists — "you *must* be insane." I have defiled my human purity with the Bionic Interface. She found the used scalpel in the recycling bin and insisted on inspecting me naked. Even so, she almost missed the tightly-curled pink flower bud on my left breast that almost perfectly matched my right nipple.

How many times she has told me about the youth of Earth and how they have abused their bodies — thrown them away, even — their worthless brains inhabiting the savage chimerae that terrorise the forests of Earth's once-peaceful cities? How dare I secretly violate my unique phenotype? The bud constantly accuses her through my shabby spacesuit liners. She cannot bear the sight of me.

I resume my solitary rambles on the dunes, communing with the lichens, passing and repassing the enigmatic dome. One day a pressure-suited figure emerges from the winking bubble and beckons me in.

I am weak. The inside of the dome is a sickening hologram. I have never before stood on anything more vertiginous than a rock. Now my brain refuses to believe that I am not perched on a dizzy platform high up among the swaying floral pinnacles of an Earthly city. The BI Chief Technician takes her helmet off and invites me to do the same. "Ah. You are Jeni, are you not? I am sure you must remember Nole Whard Junior. Would you like to meet him?"

We go inside the complex. Beanshoot is sitting staring out of the window at the perilous towers of the illusory city. He turns his head when I walk in, fixing me with a penetrating stare but saying nothing. I am silent in return, avoiding the scenery, searching for a resemblance to his famous father in those sad eyes burning in a stubbly skull furrowed with fresh scars. The BI team gather round to observe our interaction. I cannot bear it. I leave. I say nothing to mother.

For nights I dream that I am losing my grip among the foliage of a precipitous Earthly skyscraper. I wake with thundering heart and sweaty hands. A few days later I am back outside the mirror dome that reflects my mirror helmet, knocking.

BI are pleased to see me. Beanshoot suddenly has his famous father's famous head of red-gold hair (I had seen it growing in the outdoor garden which blends into the hologram, I suddenly realise). "It is Jeni!" he says. He smiles at me. Disconcerting to be greeted so eagerly by the long-lost consensual overlord of Earth. I am too shy to smile back. I leave early. For a long time, I ramble through the sands within the virtual limits of the hologram, imagining myself a winged bio-abuser floating among those perfumed floral turrets.

The next time we meet, we talk.

I tell Beanshoot about our minimal microbial ecology. He takes me into the garden and shows me his clumsy bionic experiments. He is converting a cactus into a kitten. It comes leaping over the sessile vegetation to greet us, awkward on four legs all different lengths. Its eyes, matched neither in colour nor in size, are both on the same side of its head. I pick it up. Its Green Heart flutters. I stroke its petal ears. "I think it needs a tail," I tell him. Together we work on it with the Bionic Interface and a muscular tendril from a predatory vine. The scalpel cuts cleanly through the flesh, spreading a layered red/green paste which seals the wound and glues the organisms together. We upholster the tail with the furry fungus which covers the rest of the cat. The kitten loves its tail. It chases it around the garden. We laugh. BI approve.

I become a frequent visitor to the dome.

Sometimes Beanshoot is not around to greet me. Asleep, or studying, the team say. "A good time for a chat," says the Chief Technician, sitting me down and offering me some of the wild food to which I am growing accustomed. We talk about the colony, my mother, the microscopic culture we are establishing in the sand.

I explore the compartments of the complex. One day I open the door of an untidy cubicle, littered with toys and books. Beanshoot is curled up on the rumpled bed, kitten snoring on the pillow, his thumb in his mouth, a tangle of wires leading from his tousled hair to a rack of boxes under the bed. Poor puppet.

"There are things you need to understand," the Chief Technician says. "Beanshoot is not Nole Whard's child. He is his clone. He is Earth's most precious asset. His brain is an exact duplicate of the one that held the most brilliant intellect the world had ever willingly harboured, but he has spent his formative years bathed in the morphogenetic influence of brainless sessile vegetables. All BI are doing in this secret project on Mars is to recapitulate a childhood for him before he returns to take his place as the master of Earth. Nothing sinister. We are so glad to have found him a friend of his own age to share his experience.

"I have never seen you in anything but a suit or liner," she reminds me. "Would you like to try some Earthly clothes?" She fetches me a shapeless suit, woven from gut, muscle, nerve and chameleon.

As soon as I step into the flaccid pinkish-grey bag, it blushes with brilliant colour and contracts to fit my shape. It seems to enhance my movements somehow. I feel less awkward. When I leave for home, I put my clothes on top of it, not wishing to take it off. It immediately changes colour to perfectly match my skin, imperceptible joints at wrists, ankles and waist. I peer down the neck of my liners. Even if my mother discovers that I am wearing a biotechnical artefact, she will probably approve of the way I have eliminated my sexual characteristics. How like a child I am again.

I wear my Earthly outfit constantly. It never needs washing. It digests all the dirt and produces a thin thread of excrement which I add to the diet of my microorganisms. When I reach the dome, I shed my suit and liners and wear it alone. Its colour and pattern vary with the weather and my mood, and alter as I move. Its hints to my muscles enliven the athletic games that Beanshoot and I now play in the garden, brachiating among the more climbable trees, projecting our fantasies into the hologram, imagining ourselves to be regressed gorillas swinging through the dizzy skyscrapers of Earth.

Sometimes Beanshoot is uneasy and wary of me.

"A sign of maturity," the Chief Technician says. Soon they will take Nole Whard Junior back to Earth, leaving the dome to my microforms and Mars to my mother and her friends.

I don't want them to leave. I am happy. The biological food has cleared my skin. The biotechnical suit makes me graceful and shapely. My mother is more at ease with me now, assuming that my hand-picked genes are asserting themselves at last. Until the day comes when she decides (not suspecting anything, of course, she is to tell me) to follow me on one of my outings.

How surprised she is to find me consorting with the enemy! She gasps at the hologram in disbelief. She boggles at my vivid biotechnical garments, the garden filled with our wild experiments, my companion, startling in his likeness to his progenitor. "My *God*! No wonder you have been looking so smug!" She pushes into the complex. Beanshoot and I are left outside. For hours we sit against the wall, mindlessly reassembling the vegetation at hand, while they talk inside.

Beanshoot is lucky to have spent his whole childhood without parents, I tell him. Of course he has a dozen of them now, manipulating him not just with words but with wires, drugs, surgery, hypnotism, morphogenetic generators. I stroke his hair and feel the honeycomb of raw sockets beneath. He twitches my hand away.

Hours later my mother emerges. She does not look at me. She snaps into her mirror suit and leads me back to the colony, maintaining radio silence.

"Oh yes," she says casually as we unsuit in our cabin. 'I have had a very interesting talk with the Bionics Interplanetary people. Very interesting." She smiles. She steps out of her suit and liners. She is wearing a biotechnical suit like mine; a superior version, jewelled and shimmering. "They are charming people. Nole Whard Junior is a lovely boy. Why didn't you tell me about him? You must go and see him again soon."

She sounds like the BI Chief Technician. I am enraged. She detests everything that Bionics Interplanetary has ever done and yet she ingratiates herself with the people who are trying to recreate the man who was responsible for it all. Well, I am certainly not going back there to enrich the experience of their puppet clone!

I return to my morose rambles in the dunes, my sullen stints in the laboratory, profiling the soil. I bury my biotechnical suit in the sand. My active little friends consume it in a morning. The complexity profile of the area increases alarmingly. I expect a startling new lifeform to emerge imminently, preferably a carnivorous phage that preys on biotechnical garments and their wearers.

I shun the dome.

I shun the colony.

I patrol the limbo between.

Eventually the day comes when I brood so long in the fug of my exhalations and angst that my oxygen supply is insufficient to take me back to the tunnels. Either I go to the dome, or I am found dead on the dunes in the morning. Either way, my mother will be secretly relieved. I choose the dome.

The sun has set when I get there. Beanshoot opens the airlock himself. Inside the dome there is no hologram, only the dim image of the landscape I have just left, bathed in the last red flush of sunset and the yellow headlamps of the robots that relentlessly comb the dunes.

Beanshoot must have seen me coming.

He is trembling.

I take off my helmet and breathe with relief the fresh air that rushes from the solar photosynthesising battery, still gushing oxygen when the last solar photons have slid behind the planet.

The garden is naked in the dark. The flowers are closed. The food has all been picked. The trees in which we swung in our careless ape existence have lost their foliage. Our kitten, long fallen under the morphic influence of its vegetable ancestors, has taken root again, a fat furry bundle snoring in the soil.

The complex is partially dismantled, the laboratory stripped, the project records packed and stacked outside.

Beanshoot's education is complete. The terrifying Nole Whard, architect of the Bionic Revolution, bogeyman of Mars, destroyer of my mother's dreams, stands before me — the famous steely charismatic eyes devouring me from the flushed, twitching and rapacious face.

I shrink inside my suit.

He frightens me. I cannot bear to lose him. Inside this threatening reincarnation of the most recent of the Earthly gods — the Lord of the Millenium — floats the frail foetus (luminous in my imagination) whose helplessness burned my heart as I lay angry in hospital.

We touch.

My padded suit feels nothing.

My eyes challenge my old companion to emerge from this menacing stranger.

My body betrays me.

Inside my suit and liners, excited by a hormonal hair-trigger, I feel the bud on my breast stir, tingle, part and swell; a florid blossom throbbing against my thudding heart.

Vibrated by some pheromonal harmonic, the whole garden stirs.

My mother still sighs with nostalgia over the Earth of her childhood. The Green Heart and the Bionic Interface already dominated agriculture, but the origins of their food had never interested the inhabitants of the steel and concrete city in which she dwelt.

The sudden urban fashion for bionic artefacts did not interest her either. She loathed the tenements of her birth where the neighbourhood youth had suddenly sprouted horns, fangs, talons and stings and terrorised the district; sometimes, after a midnight orgy of howls and rooftop scramblings, leaving a gnawed and part-dismembered corpse in her sterile backyard, constantly scoured of biological enemies.

She despised the suburban gardens where animate plants frolicked among the newly exotic flora; the bourgeois living-rooms where rumbustious toddlers harmlessly clambered over the robust, self-renovating, seed-grown furniture while their mothers fiddled with the bright feathers and flowers growing in their hair.

Perhaps, as she flicked through the financial papers, looking for a man who would marry her and carry her

away to a world of timeless prosperity untouched by fashion, she noticed the features of young Nole Whard, charismatic ecology-conscious promoter of biotechnical artefacts, whose company, Bionics Inc., was soaring to astonishing success on a wave of ecological angst and millenial fervour. If so, she was appalled at the vulgarity of both his products and his sales pitch. The man was trying to make the whole world crawl with shame at the way the conventional industries had treated the planet, and then to promise an almost religious salvation if they turned from their sins and restored the biosphere to the green domain of their biological companions.

Not in barbary, but with all the comforts of civilisation. Bionics International, as it was by then, had cornered, some say invented, applied morphogenesis. Nole Whard could grow anything. Machines were just crude imitations of living things, he would say; let us grow living things to do their work. Let us fashion from the soil all the comforts of the new age in which humanity would be reborn in a new garden of Eden; a second chance under skies scoured of industrial pollution; the raped and tormented Earth consoled at last by partnering a perfect new humanity in a bounteous, blissful and fruitful marriage.

The year 2000 was approaching. The skies were dark, acid, depleted of oxygen. The industrial culture had exhausted itself, the last few factories expelling their effluents into a landscape of rusting dereliction roamed by the despairing unemployed. My mother, having successfully climbed the ladder by virtue of her beauty and ambition, marrying an entrepreneur in a safe-looking conventional industry, sat comfortably in her sterile marble house surrounded by concrete walls, waiting for the tide to turn.

Catastrophe theory applies to morphogenetics. The moment came when the accumulated resonances from BI's inventions started to vibrate every organism on the planet. Nole Whard was quite suddenly swept to power as the prophet of the new Bionic age, his intense, shining face filling all the media windows, his vibrant voice promising to vanquish all four horsemen of the Apocalypse with the green sword of Bionics.

BI became the most successful company in the history of capitalism. Every other industry went under. My mother's husband jumped from the towering concrete emblem of his achievement just before the cities crumbled to fragments, their foundations shattered by the thrusting shoots of skyscrapers springing in entirety from a single seed. My mother's concrete courtyard buckled. Her sheltering walls collapsed. The seething, teeming, unstoppable life of the city irrupted into her once secure domain. Bitterly, she faced the future, seeing in this jubilant reflorescence only the revenge of the bugs, mould and excrement of her slum upbringing which she had been trying to expunge all her life.

The last surviving conventional industry, using metal concentrated by foliage, smelted by energy extracted from rotting compost, created the fleet of spaceships whereby the freshly-rechristened Bionics Interplanetary would spread the irresistible message to the rest of the system. Blue-green algae on Mars. Lichens on Venus.

All the accumulated wealth and pull of her husband's lost empire were just enough to secure my mother a place in the Martian colony. She was carrying her last, hoarded treasure: an embryo combining her beautiful, ambitious chromosomes with those of a certified genius of outstanding physique, all harmful genes enzymed out. Only slightly consoled by the news that Nole Whard, personally accompanying the promising Titan expedition in an invincible, infinitely-survivable ship, had met an uncalculated asteroid and been presumed pulverised, she turned her back on Earth.

She never intended to return.

But now she does.

All through the trip to Earth she prances through the ship in her sparkling biotechnical suit, rejoicing; her antipathy to all BI and I have wrought forgotten in her dizzying, preening pride. Her smiles irradiate the whole cabin. Beanshoot and I, instruments of her success, stare sullenly at each other, strangers again. We have not had a moment alone together since those last few seconds in the unfurling garden before the ever vigilant BI team rushed out and proposed a marriage between us. "How we hoped you would say yes," they said, after I had contemplated life without my refuge, and said it. "You have been part of the project all along, after all."

And so we are married on the flight deck of the ship at the moment that it enters Earth orbit for the final approach to the spaceport. As we exchange our vows, the drive is cut and we achieve weightlessness. We are swept off our feet, head over heels, revolving around each other in the great control bubble, our hair and clothes billowing. We cannot reach each other. I have to throw my bouquet into the wheeling crowd to project myself within grappling distance of my bridegroom who finally, fumblingly, puts a ring on my finger as the ship makes a ring around the planet. Dizzy and nauseous. we kiss. Our dry, doubting lips pressed apprehensively together. My mother and the BI team, anchored to cleats in the walls, ringingly cheer us, delight and relief shining in their faces.

We land.

I step out of the spaceship and straight into shock. Outdoors without protection, I imagine myself suffocating in the oxygen-rich atmosphere. I choke. Strange pollens and perfumes irritate my respiratory system. I weep. Gravity clamps my feet to the ground. I stumble. The swaying green buildings tower alarmingly above me.

I cling to Beanshoot for support. He is smiling expansively, entranced by the mobile plants which cluster around us, fronds upraised to savour our carbon dioxide, calyces begging our hands for pollination. My mother, ignoring everything external, embraces us both in an excess of irrepressible joy. The President of Bionics Interplanetary himself strides towards us, kicking aside the floral carpet which has prostrated itself at our feet.

A jostling crowd of news-crews surges an awed distance away, trying to encapsulate in this emotional tableau all the drama, poignancy and relief of the return to Earth of the miraculously-rescued, miraculously-restored avatar of the saviour of humanity on the day of his wedding to an ethereally-beautiful Martian child bride. A hushed human throng watches us from every level of the verdant towers.

We are driven in a closed carriage to the grandest hotel in the city, a rare haven of glass and metal modules grafted to the branches of a tranquillised

oak. Accompanied by a fussing retinue of BI primpers, bustling around us with clothes, jewels, cosmetics and drugs. Just for a few moments we are left alone. Rigid on the plastic bed, afraid to spoil our perfect finish, we gaze into each other's dazed, glazed eyes.

Our nervous hands touch. Poor us. The only thing we have in common is that we have both been manipulated all our conscious lives. The last act of our tormentors has been to gently inject us with the pubescent hormones that BI have been suppressing since we became part of the project.

Desire suffuses me. I try to embrace my new husband. Our biotechnical dancing garments force us into a stylised clasp; wrists and elbows flexed, fingers spread and extended.

Beanshoot reddens. Our hot cheeks touch. Our lips meet. His pirouetting fingers brush my flower, erect petals pressing the restraining fabric. Pulling with all his strength at the neck of my dress, he bends his head to my blossom.

His lips encircle my corolla. His tongue probes my tingling petals. My pistil throbs. The fingers of his right hand gently massage my swollen sepals; his left hand whitens as he struggles with the strenuously-resisting neckline. My skirt binds my legs. I writhe on the bed. A sudden gush of hot saliva, swimming with inhaled pollen, floods my burning calyx.

They come for us. We sit up, blushing. The neck of my dress rises angrily to my throat.

We are driven in a low-flying winged chariot to an informal reception at the top of the BI tower. We sit apart, both wrapped in the revived fantasies of our interrupted adolescence. Crowds line the streets, staring at us in silent awe. The whole city is in bloom, our floral portraits on huge hoardings, a rain of scented petals spiralling down around us. As the sun goes down, photoluminescent bacteria light up.

The top of the BI tower is open to the sky. It is the original of our familiar hologram, disturbing again now that the dizzying drop is no longer an illusion. The President introduces us to various dignitaries. We eat and drink. We dance.

My mother takes the President by the hand and twirls him away in her twinkling galaxy of a dress, floating on wave after wave of vindicated ambition. Beanshoot and I cling together, hot faces touching, tender bodies brushing in our energetic garments which tirelessly circle the dance floor while we shuffle inside them aching with gravity, exhaustion, misery and desire.

The President bows and asks me for the pleasure and my mother pirouettes Beanshoot away in her tireless, rapturous ecstasy. I watch him over the President's shoulder. He is watching the plants, dreamily.

The President smiles affably. "No doubt you think Nole Whard Junior is the most important person in the world," he says. "You are right of course. The entire population of this planet is in resonance with his field. His father was their leader. Now they need to be led again."

Nole Whard Senior was a genius. But he was not really an astute businessperson. More a Messiah. Bionics has become a religion. Most of BI's products are now outside the economy, having reproduced or gone autonomous. They have to get back to steel and concrete. Nole Whard Junior and I must inspire the young; wean them away from their jungle existence, living free in the trees and on drugs, and get them back to robot jewellery and holographic clothes. He knows that we will do a good job, especially as our fields have been recannulated by our largely artificial environments.

He beams at his dreams. "Now I must return you to your husband." But where is he? I search for his golden corona among the gathering. "He was talking to the plants," my mother says; "he was fascinated by them."

We call to him. No answer.

We anxiously peer over the sickening drop. No crumpled body in the undergrowth. "He can climb like a monkey," I tell them.

"No sense in alarming anybody," says the President. He will take us back to the hotel where no doubt my husband will join us shortly.

We wait all night. I lie on the bed while next door my mother wails and paces the room. Our luminous floral portraits burn through the night.

The morning brings the President, stern and distant, informing us that Nole Whard Junior has still not been found. Fortunately the marriage has not been consummated, so there will be no problems about ending it.

My mother weeps and draws the blinds against the alien landscape, her triumph turned to bitterness.

Sad music emanates non-commitally from the holovision.

Above my aching heart, a hard seed is setting in the ovary of my breast flower.

My dancing dress has died and hangs limp and brown on the chairback.

A green tendril sneaks under the door sill, avoiding my mother's field of vision as she sobs in front of the dresser mirror. Hour by hour, it inches across the floor. I watch it silently. As dawn approaches, it reaches my bed and tugs at my hand. My mother is snoring in her chair. I put on my old spacesuit liners and go out after it.

I am not in the well-trimmed streets through which we flew on rainbow birdwings amid showers of petals and cascades of multicoloured blossoms opening in sequence. I am not worshipped by adoring throngs but stalked by skulking tigers and shambling apes, their mean human faces poking through the transplanted fur. Most of the buildings have gone wild and are sprouting shapeless spare rooms in which these beasts have made their untidy nests. A bird the size of a light aircraft takes off, its massive wings clattering, a shredded biotechnical garment dangling from its beak. Ugly ambulant plants sidle up and press their tumid calyces against me, dusting my liners with pollen.

Before I have gone half a block, my mother catches up. "You cannot go out here! Have you any idea how dangerous it is? These people are animals!" Outside Snakey's All-Night Bio Parlour, a pride of mangy lions are tearing at a headless torso, their tacky manes clotted with blood. Ignoring my mother's disgust, I follow the vine to its conclusion.

We find Beanshoot in a tangle of service roots at the base of the BI tower. Only his head is visible above the blanketing undergrowth. He is lying in a bower of flowers, protected by a cage of thorns, his face as

contented as when he suckled a bottle of milk on the Chief Technician's knee.

"What does he mean by this?" my mother yells; "doesn't he know we have been out of our minds with worry?"

Beanshoot turns his head and looks at us comfortably (insolently, I imagine my mother thinking), then turns back to the blossoms which congregate around his head.

"Has he no thought for others? Going off with a *plant* on his *wedding night*! These vegetables don't give a damn about him. All he is to them is fertiliser — manure!"

She runs bellowing into the BI building to fetch the President, who arrives in an armoured suit and respirator, leading an armoured team, mincing in trepidation around the poisoned spurting spears that the plant has thrown up in self-defence. My mother is screaming even louder because now I am inside the deadly cage.

As soon as she had gone, he turned to me. The vine still in my hands contracted, the barricade of thorns parted, and I crawled inside the green shelter, pushing aside the clustering blossoms and pressing my head to his. Don't worry, I said. I stroked his cheek. It was cold and dewy. His skin looked greenish in the early light. His mouth moved without words. I have just kissed his clammy, pollen-crusted lips and am searching for his honeyed tongue when the President and his team move in, brandishing machetes, flamethrowers and herbicidal aerosols.

Our thorns go into action.

All the plants in the square join in: flailing venomous tendrils, whiplashing vines, pods bursting like bombs. A stench of sap and roasting vegetables and unsmelt defensive phenomones that whip the unprotected into a screaming panic. ("Get out, Jeni, get out!" my mother shrieks, but by now I am bound to the ground by a web of tendrils.)

The BI team move on, imperturbable in armour, hacking, burning and spraying, while my mother howls in desperation and I twist in the grip that binds me eye-to-eye with Beanshoot's terrified face.

My hair and liners are on fire. Weedkiller sears my lungs. My blood splatters our faces. A rain of toxic sap slops from the blades of the slashing machetes.

At last the resistance dies down and I lie, gently unbound, in a blackened, blighted thicket; staring into Beanshoot's foggy eyes as the team scrabble to unearth him. They clear the fallen petals from around his head and neck and then stagger back in shock as the unmistakable red/green sandwich of the Bionic Interface comes into view, followed by the wheezing sponge of a failing Green Heart.

From there down, he is all roots.

I faint.

I wake in a rectangular chamber filled with diffuse golden light.

I have no heart. I am not breathing. Pain scrapes my eviscerated thorax. My raw skin still burns.

My mother hovers over my bed. "Dead!" she whimpers occasionally. The President paces the room, moving in and out of the field of vision of my unfocused, immobile eyes; his angry strides quaking the floor. "It has gone much too far!" he mutters, throwing up some shade to let a white rectangle into the golden haze of the room. "Look at them all out there! They have taken over the world! How did we let it happen?"

"Dead," my mother sniffs again, "poor boy!" So it is not I who am dead! Something out of my sight is circulating and ventilating my blood. A new heart and lungs developing among the blood clots in my chest cavity.

"Kidnapped, raped and *killed* by a fucking autonomous vegetable!" the President bursts out, agonised.

"Poor boy," my mother says. "Nobody should die in this day and age. Nole Whard Junior was so innocent." She has heard on the holovision that the plant entrapped him on the dancefloor — trussing him with its tendrils, gassing him with its perfume, hauling him down the side of the building with its vines. How terrible it was to see her son-in-law in its rapacious clutches!

She sobs. "Just for a moment, while I watched the rescue, I imagined — of course my mind was mostly on my poor daughter — but I thought I saw — for a second I thought that the silly boy had deliberately interfaced himself with the plant. Then I heard on the holo that the dying vegetable, its roots having already reduced his body to gnawed bones, had cut his throat with one last spiteful slash of its thorns, rather than surrender him. Oh my God. Jeni cannot hear me, can she?"

"No," says the President. "Your daughter will be unconscious for a long time yet. The shock. She has been very badly burned. But you must not worry. We are growing her a new skin. New breasts as well. Your daughter will be lovelier than ever."

"The estate . . ." My continuing good looks assured, my mother is turning her mind to Nole Whard's billions.

"That will go to his son, of course."

"His son?"

My mother's spasm of alarm rocks my bed.

"Well, naturally, we had him cloned as soon as we could get a sample to the lab. Nole Whard III will be a lively blastocyst by now."

Tears fall onto my bandages. A quavering wail escapes my mother's throat. "*My daughter*!"

"No safer place for a clone than a female uterus," says the President benignly. I feel my mother relax. Joy eases her heart. Her daughter, virgin mother to the prophet of the steel and concrete renaissance, new skin glowing with radiant maternity, new breasts swollen with celestial milk.

My mother's vanity squirms in my womb, sickening me. I try to protest. I have no breath. A drug paralyses me.

Smiling, on the arm of the President, my mother leaves the room.

Lee Montgomerie was born and brought up in Zambia (or Northern Rhodesia, as it was once called). She has been living in Leeds for over a decade now, and has worked on the local "alternative" newspaper there. She has written occasional book reviews and fanzine pieces, but "Green Hearts" is her first professionally published story. We have another one from her which should appear in a coming issue of *Interzone*.

SOULMATES

Alex Stewart

We met his eyes as soon as we popped out of the air, Mira and I, and we knew. She muttered something short and explosive in 25th Anglic, and we glanced at one another uneasily.

"No matter," I said in 22nd Inglish, our usual tongue. "Makes no difference."

"Concur. Think they know?"

"Justice? Must do. Know everything."

"They say so." She shrugged, radiating cynicism, and we turned our attention to the target.

He was small and sallow, like most of his contemporaries, his naturally pasty complexion intensified by his illness and shock at our sudden appearance. Our brief exchange had gone over his head, although the language hadn't changed that much in the interim, and he was eyeing us warily. He was holding a glass —brandy I guessed from the odour—and he drained it in one, the spark of animation returning to his eyes. His first reaction, predictably, was one of belligerence.

"Explain yourselves. Who the devil are you, and what do you mean by this intrusion?"

"Hop explanation, George." Mira ignored him, knowing what I'd do, and trying to change my mind before I could start. She jerked her head towards the window, forcing me to take in our surroundings. A thick yellow fog writhed hungrily against the pane, searching for a way in to devour us, while unseen hansom cabs rattled against the cobbles in the street. "Too primitive. Beyond his mind."

"I want to try," I said. "I think he's entitled." My speech was beginning to slip, lapsing back into the late 20th, as it always seems to under stress. Reverting to childhood Mira calls it, but I've noticed she does the same thing herself at times. It seemed to reassure the target anyway, coming closer to an idion he understood.

"I most certainly am." He still looked bewildered and angry, but he was beginning to calm down a little—which meant he was less likely to panic and do something desperate. Targets often did when they realised what was happening.

"Still say hop it." Mira clicked her tongue impatiently. People had changed noticeably by the 25th, if she was anything to go by, and she was out of her depth so far downtime. Primitive psychology was never her forte. "Send up and go."

"My rock, my rules." I pretended to be more irritated with her than I was, hoping to put the target off his guard. "Don't like, query Justice."

She nodded, understanding, and took the hint. To my surprise the target nodded too, thoughtfully, not fooled for a second. He must have been tuning in faster than I realised. Good thing, probably. At least now I stood a chance of being able to convince him.

"It's a long story." I gazed into his eyes, cold, hard, and steel grey. After a moment he flushed and pulled away.

"Then you'd better sit down." He waved at a pair of uncomfortable-looking leather armchairs beside the fire. I lowered myself reluctantly into one, while he pottered across the room towards a cut-glass decanter and a tray of glasses.

"Prefer standing." Mira was wandering around with the curious detachment of a bored museum visitor, eyeing the heavy furnishings with amusement and evident distaste.

"As you wish." He was determined to seem affable, hiding his confusion and anger behind the mask of the perfect host. Natural behaviour in his time, and probably successful with anyone else. He refilled his glass, and turned to face me. "Can I offer you a drink, Mr . . .?"

"Endicott," I said. "No thank you. I never mix business with alcohol."

"Oh." He looked vaguely surprised, replacing the decanter on the tabletop. "And your companion? Miss . . .?"

"Mira Tsu." She glanced back at him, briefly, over her shoulder. "Never downtime."

"Oh." He looked even more puzzled, but her refusal

was plain enough. He came back to the fire, settling into the other chair, almost facing me, and adjusted his smoking jacket. Neither of us spoke; he just sat there, sipping his drink, studying me closely. Disguise was unnecessary for this one, and Mira and I were in the ubiquitous field grey of the Justice operator. I returned his gaze impassively. Eventually, as I'd intended, he broke the thickening silence, giving me the psychological advantage.

"I've never had any dealings with you, Mr Endicott, so far as I'm aware. In fact I can't recall even having heard of a George Endicott before."

"It's Darryl," I said. "Darryl Endicott. George is a joke, a nickname." I didn't bother to explain—he wouldn't get it anyway. "And you're right, we've never met."

"Then what brings you here? And how did you enter my house?" The perfect gentleman routine was already beginning to fray a little round the edges, I noticed.

"We wanted to talk to you." I shifted a little, trying to make myself comfortable in the lumpy armchair. "About a friend of yours."

His guard came up at once, and his reply was cold enough to liquefy the air.

"I feel I ought to warn you, Endicott, that my friends are all respectable men. Moreover they're not without influence." Mira puffed up her cheeks like a bullfrog behind his back, and I fought to keep my face expressionless. The target took a self-satisfied sip at his drink. "Now who did you have in mind?"

"Jack the Ripper," I said.

The effect was quite satisfying. He said nothing, but the brandy surged back and forth in his glass like a pocket tsunami. His face began to redden, and his knuckles showed white against the glass.

"You'll break it if you hold it that tightly," I remarked. Angry words began to bubble in his throat.

"How dare you insinuate that I . . ."

"Seal it." Mira had been examining the gently-hissing gas jets, fascinated by the flickering yellow flame. Later she tried to copy the effect with holos, but it never looked quite the same. Now she turned to stare at him, her quiet contempt cutting him off more thoroughly than raising her voice could ever have done. "Think you lie freely? Justice brief us, know everything." And she began to reel off the names, dates, and deeds he'd spent years trying to suppress. After a while he gave up even the pretence of anger and ignorance, staring from one of us to the other like a fearful rodent.

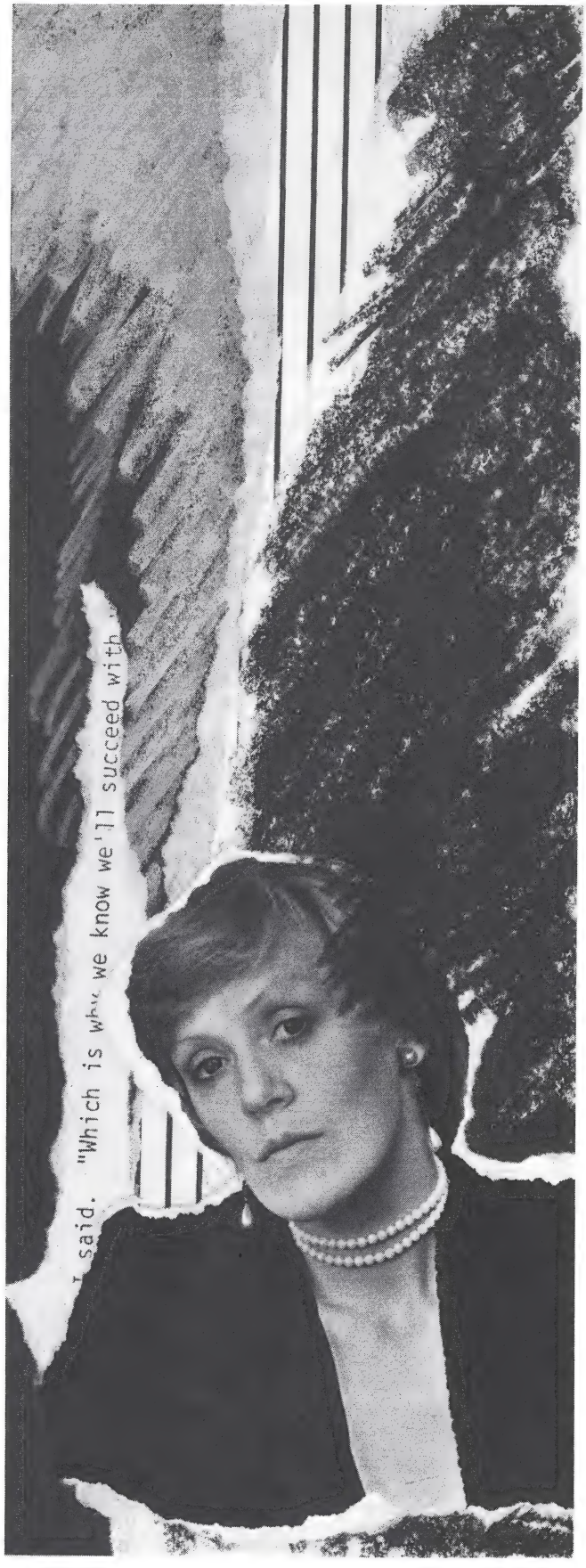
"How did you know? How could you?" His hand shook as he raised the brandy to his lips.

"Think you had enough." Mira took the glass away before he could taste it, gently but firmly, like a mother moving to forestall some childish overindulgence. He tried to hang on to it for a moment, increasing the resemblance, then let it go suddenly, astonished at her strength.

"She's always had a good memory," I said. We both knew that wasn't what he asked.

"Who told you?" He leaned forward, so much a parody of furtive urgency I had trouble keeping a straight face. "Who sent you here?"

"Justice. Work for Justice, our assignment." Mira



Illustrated by Iris Smith

shrugged. "Clear?"

From where I sat it was obviously anything but. His eyes were clouded with confusion, which failed to mask a growing unease. Mira's constant references to Justice seemed to have touched a nerve; he probably thought we were there to kill or arrest him. I'd have to calm him down again, distract him, while I tried to find a way of explaining our mission in terms he'd understand. Flattery seemed a good bet, given what I'd seen of his character so far, so I tried that.

"You did an excellent job of keeping it quiet," I said. "A textbook case. They were very impressed." He nodded slowly, hanging on to my every word. "While everyone thought the killings were the work of a solitary maniac, you and your confederates were safe. But interest in the case never died away as you'd hoped." I shifted my weight again; that chair was hideously uncomfortable. "From a historical perspective a conspiracy was obvious. And from that it was easy to identify the culprits." I shrugged. It really had been pretty simple.

"A historical perspective?" He blinked, looking slightly dazed. "It's only been a few years, man. Hardly time to gain a historical perspective."

"For you perhaps," I said. This was the critical moment. If I fumbled it now I could lose him. "But it's taken us centuries. Possibly millennia. Nobody knows how far uptime Justice really is."

"Centuries?" He simply didn't believe it, failed to understand—and I can't say I blamed him. "How could it be?"

"Future times anything possible, yes?" Mira plunged in to my rescue. The target had almost forgotten her, and turned, looking startled.

"I suppose so. But what . . ."

"Can reverse time, visit history. Fact. We proof."

It must have been the tone of her voice that convinced him, if only for a fraction of a second, as matter-of-fact as a shopping list. And why not? We wander around the centuries as casually as our target might hail a cab. Whatever the reason I saw a brief flash of acceptance appear in his eyes, and stepped in at once to reinforce it.

"That's right. I live in the twenty-first century. Mira's from the twenty-fifth."

Doubt and belief were still churning together behind his eyes. If he hadn't been partially tuned by now he wouldn't have considered it for a second.

"So you really did appear out of thin air. I thought it was some sort of conjuring trick."

"No trick." I shook my head emphatically. "We hopped in from the twenty-third. That's as far downtime as Mira can get on her own. And as far up as I'm allowed."

"I see." He obviously didn't. "Then how did she get here? If that's not too silly a question."

"We're soulmates," I said. "She uses my field."

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Ever tried swimming against the current?" I asked. That he could grasp, and he nodded eagerly. "The same thing applies to the temporal flow. There's no practical restriction on hops in the uptime direction, but two cens downtime of your own natural lifespan's your limit."

"Unless you find earlier soulmate." Mira caught my eye and smiled. I nodded, for the target's benefit, and smiled back.

"That's right. I was born in the twentieth, died in the twenty-first." I glanced at his face, trying to assess how much of this he was taking in. Very little, I suspected; his expression was unreadable, at least in terms I was familiar with."So I made the hop, and brought Mira down with me."

"You know when you'll die?" This wasn't the reaction I'd been expecting, and it threw me completely. Later I did some more reading, and found they were obsessed with death at this period. I didn't know that at the time, though, so I just nodded and hid my confusion.

"More or less," I said. "I can't be bothered to look up the date."

He fell back in his chair, collapsing like an andy on powerdown, shaking his head and muttering something I couldn't catch.

"Didn't come to talk, George." Mira was getting impatient, and letting me know it. We'd been there for nearly an hour, getting nowhere.

"No. No, I'm sure you didn't." The target took a sudden interest in her, then swung his gaze back to me as the more easily understandable.

"You'll have to bear with me," I said. "There's so much you don't know, don't understand, things we find as natural as breathing. It makes it very hard to explain."

"Told you," said Mira. "Too primitive. Just deal with like others." Which was the wrong thing to say; like I said, primitive psychology was never her strong point.

"Others? What others?" The target tensed, getting panicky. His hands closed reflexively on the ends of the chair arms, ready to catapult him to his feet. I nodded to Mira, and her hand went unobtrusively to the staser in her pocket.

"Your co-conspirators. And the killer, of course. We've been to see them already."

"But didn't timewaste." Her irritation was growing visibly. "Why he different?"

"You know why," I said. "You knew as soon as we hopped in. Doesn't it mean anything to you?"

"No." She smiled suddenly. "But understand. You closer. Take time, no worry."

"Thanks." I squeezed her hand, and turned back to the target. His face was paler than ever, and I knew then I'd have to hurry.

"What do you want with me? What's happening?"

"I'm trying to explain," I said, trying to hide my growing irritation with him. I was already half inclined to follow Mira's suggestion, just to get it over with, but decided on one last attempt. Somehow it was important to me that he understood. "But you'll have to let me work around to it in my own way. Otherwise you'll never understand what I'm getting at, OK?"

"All right. I'll listen." He sat forward attentively.

"Good." I thought for a moment. "Have you ever heard of reincarnation?"

"I think so. Some heathen superstition." He scowled disapprovingly at Mira. "Our missionaries ought to have eradicated it by now."

"They'll find that rather difficult," I said. "Since it's a fact."

He snorted contemptuously.

"Is that it, then? You're here to convert me to some heathen mumbo-jumbo?" He made as if to stand. "If that's all you've got to say then I'll bid you goodnight, Mr Endicott."

"Wait. Listen." Mira laid a hand on his shoulder, forcing him gently back into his chair. I went on as though nothing had happened.

"Whether you believe me or not is immaterial. In a couple of centuries it'll be proven beyond any doubt. The soul survives after death, to be reborn in another body." I rummaged through my half-forgotten store of Christian theology, trying to phrase it in terms he'd understand. "Each successive life gains a little in spiritual grace, and so grows a little closer to God. Usually." I had him hooked now, I could tell, although he wasn't going to admit it.

"Even if this blasphemous nonsense is true, I still don't see what it has to do with me."

"Don't you?" I said. "A man who connived at the deaths of innocent people? Who allowed the killer to escape punishment, left him free to strike again and again? Believe us, your miserable soul is in jeopardy, and like it or not we mean to save it!"

I'd gone too fast for him again, I could tell. He just sat there, inert beneath Mira's restraining hand, and blinked at me in a stupefied sort of way.

"What do you mean? My soul . . .?" He said at last.

"The good you do in your life sustains it, makes it grow," I said, explaining it as simply as I could. "But the evil eats away at it, like a cancer. If your soul's clean at your death you're sure of rebirth in a higher state; if it's stained by guilt, by the evil you've done, you lose whatever you may have gained before, and grace and God recede. Do you understand that?" Which was more than I did, trying to explain the Cycle of Growth in terms of his archaic religion. He nodded nevertheless.

"You want me to repent. Give money to charity, that sort of thing."

"That might help." I nodded slowly, trying to conceal my contempt. "But I'm afraid it's too late for that."

"Too late? What do you mean it's too late?" He was becoming frightened again, believing me in spite of himself, but afraid to face the consequences.

"You ill." Mira spoke softly, sadly in his ear. "History says you die tonight."

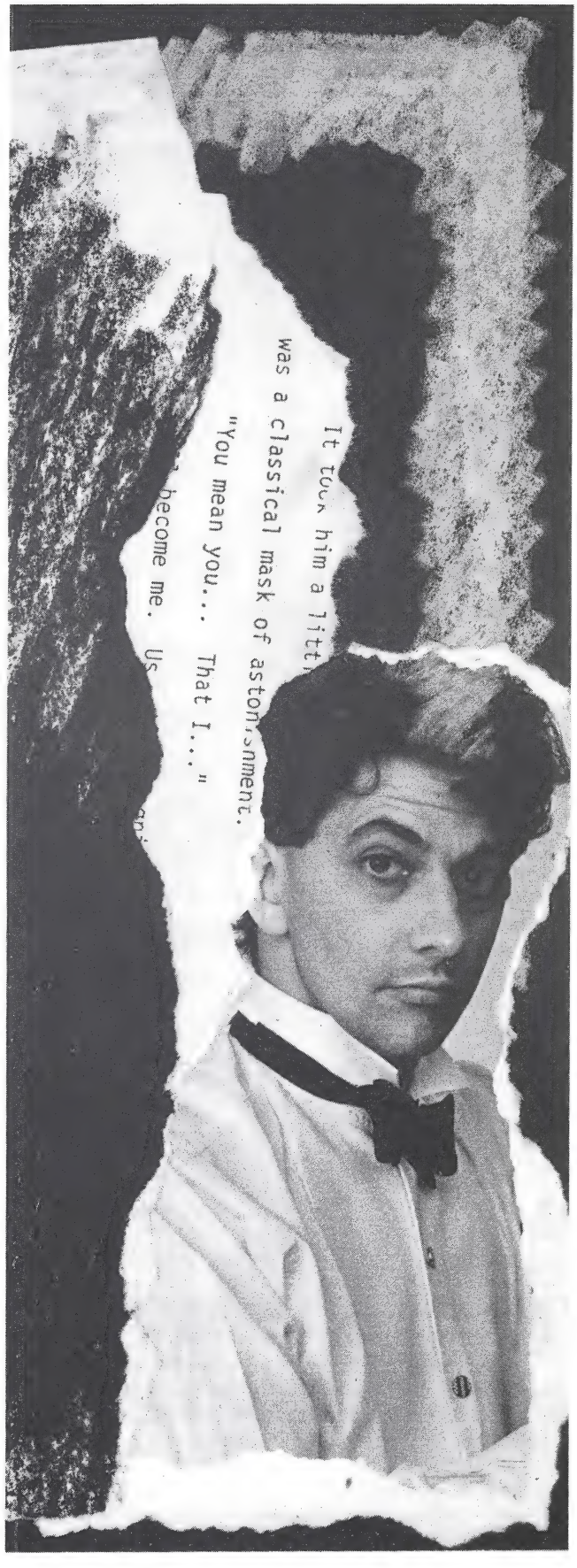
He said nothing for a long time, darting frantic little glances between us, looking more like a rodent than ever. His mouth worked, trying to form words, and his hands trembled violently.

"But I can't! Not now!" His voice rose and broke, reason retreating in the face of his animal terrors. "You've got to help me. You must!"

"Why else we here?" Mira patted him gently on the shoulder. "Trust Justice."

"What are you talking about?" He was near to tears, his bewilderment so strong I nearly gave up on him then and there. But I wanted him to understand, damn it, to be able to accept the final, absolute assurance I knew I could give.

"Justice exists far, far in the future," I said. "And they use people like us as their agents. We find the guilty, and send them uptime to be judged. When they return their souls are cleansed, and they can die at



their proper time assured of continuing the cycle.

He took a long time to absorb it, working hard to overcome his fears. He did well too; when he spoke again his voice hardly shook at all.

"I assume I've no choice in the matter."

"None." Mira shook her head emphatically. "Got orders. Carry them out."

"I see." He nodded heavily. "What happens? I mean . . ."

"I don't know," I said. "But I doubt if it's pleasant."

"Concur." Mira nodded agreement.

"I shouldn't say this." I hesitated. "But if it's any consolation we know it works. Memories don't carry over, but we do know it happened to us in an early life."

Mira glared at me, feeling it was none of his business. But the target was looking at me strangely, and my attention was wholly on him.

"You mean lives, don't you? I know your English is a little strange, but . . ."

"Only one," I said. "So far as we know. I'm the earliest operator, so we can't help anyone much further down."

An interesting range of expressions began to play across his face, and his eyes began to flicker between us.

"You mean you're both . . . ."

"Soulmates. Already said." Mira was beginning to lose patience again.

"We share the same soul," I explained. "Mira was born about four hundred years after my death, remember? She's what I'll become in another few lifetimes." I caught her eye and grinned. "Something to look forward to."

She stuck her tongue out at me, and grinned back.

"Incredible." He was beyond disbelief now, simply accepting everything we told him without demur.

"Inevitable," Mira corrected. "Moving in time, some soulmates bound to meet."

"Exactly," I said. "Which is why we know we'll succeed with you."

It took him a little bit longer to catch on to that. When he did, his face was a classical mask of astonishment.

"You mean you . . . That I . . ."

"Will become me. Us. We recognised you as soon as we appeared." I signalled unobtrusively to Mira, and she stepped up quietly behind him. "Whatever happens, remember that. Remember it works."

Then she sent him uptime, and we waited in silence. A second or so later he hopped back in, swayed on his feet, and collapsed to the floor. He stared at us for a moment, and his mouth began to twitch; but before he could say anything he shuddered, went limp, and discarded his body.

Mira and I looked at one another, shrugged, and went uptime to a civilised age.

"You very quiet." She sank gratefully into a comfortable chair. I prowled around the rim of the carpet, sighed, and shook my head.

"Was thinking. No matter."

"Know you, George. Can't fool me. What problem?"

"Him. Target." I fidgeted uneasily, trying to put my feelings into words. "He was loathsome, Mira. Primitive. Arrogant. Materialist. All that bloodshed for some worthless reputation. But he became us."

"So? Cycle of Growth. Next life better. What problem?"

I stopped pacing, tried to look her in the eye.

"Mira. Be honest. Do I look like that to you?"

She smiled lazily.

"You what you are, George. Who not?"

So we lived out our lives, and in time I forgot him.

Alex Stewart has contributed two stories to *Interzone* before now. His "Seasons Out of Time" appeared in our second issue, and "The Caulder Requiem" appeared in our fourth. Alex has recently been working on a science-fiction novel. He is 25 years old, and lives in Essex.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY IAN SANDERSON

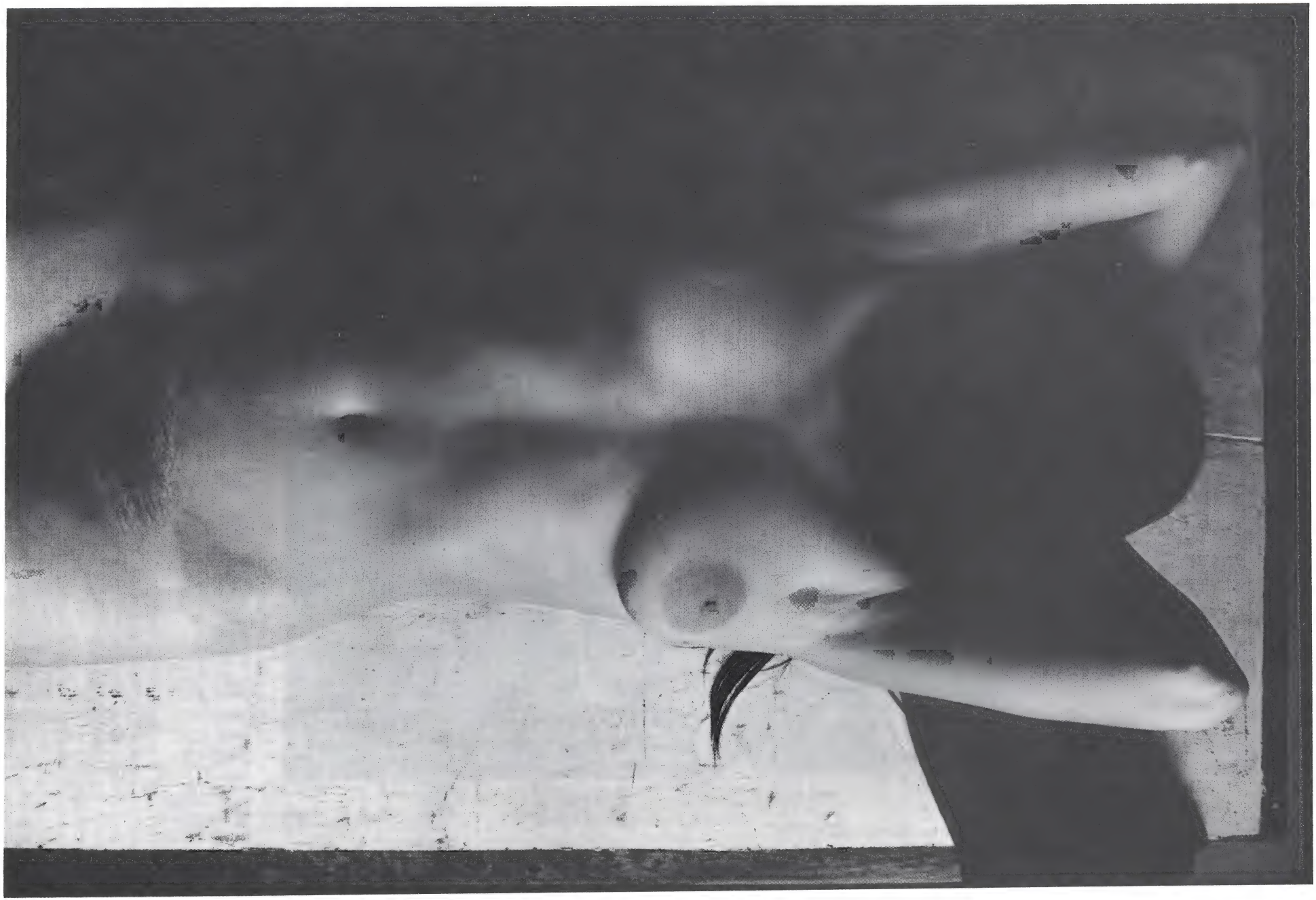
Ian Sanderson writes:

In a dream I saw three figures with long moonlit shadows. They travelled across the pavement and up a red brick wall. I woke and looked out of the window to see the figures dissolve into the chimneys and gables of the tall Victorian houses opposite.

In the morning I thought I would examine the houses to see what had fixed this image in my mind. There were no chimneys and no gables. In the night I had awoken from a dream *and was still dreaming.*

Experiences like the one I have described influence my work a great deal. I like photographs which demonstrate a particular vision. My pictures represent my way of seeing.

I was born in Glasgow in 1951, and left to study fine art in the North East of England. I worked as a freelance screen printer for a couple of years, then as a photographer for the conservation department of a group of museums based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. That took me to 1978 when I went south, to Brighton, to take a course in Art Education. I am now a lecturer at West Sussex College of Design.



LOVE, AMONG THE CORRIDORS

Gene Wolfe

Her own footfalls echoed after her, reverberating from stone floor to ceiling of stone, so that she felt herself pursued, though she knew herself to be the pursuer. The ticking of the clocks told the footsteps of time.

The walls were lined with pictures and carvings, with dusty furniture and old vases bellied like the cupids on a Valentine. She looked at all and walked on. She could not bear to think of where she had begun to walk (for that was nothingness) or where she went (for that was to the grave).

When it had grown late, and all the windows of the palace were darkened by more than ivy, she saw, among the other statues and figures, a Harlequin cast of bronze standing upon a marble pedestal. There was nothing about him, perhaps, to take her interest, and yet take it he did; and with one small, white hand, she touched him.

At once it seemed the sun had broken through the ivy and the evening. An aureate ray pierced the window nearest the statue and touched it too, so that she saw immediately that, cobwebbed though it was, it was not a statue at all but a living Harlequin, dominoed and costumed as in the old plays.

When the sunlight had faded—as it did in an instant—the ruddy glow of health remained in the Harlequin's cheeks and the light of life in his eyes.

He moved and sneezed at the dust, raising a great, grey cloud of it; then sneezing again, leaped from his pedestal. She started back in fear.

"What is your name?" he said, wiping his nose upon his sleeve.

And she, "Amor . . ."

"I too. But who are you, and how came you to walk in this palace?"

Taking courage, she told him, "That is the question no one can answer. Rather, recount to me how you, who appeared but an image a moment ago, are now a man."

"By stepping down," he said. "At least, that is how it seems to me when I reflect upon it. For a long time—oh, very long, longer than your whole dear life, I feel sure—I stood . . ." He hesitated.

"Why, right up there, wasn't it? Right up on that stone block, that seems so ordinary now. Ten thousand times, at least, I watched the sun come in at those windows and go out, and Night come with her cats and wolves. Many a hundred walkers have I seen go up and down this corridor before yourself, my darling. It seems to me now that at any moment I might have stepped down, and yet I did not, nor even thought on it. And now it seems to me that I might mount up again and pose as I did before, and yet that would be too laborious for me to stand. But tell me more; who are you, and who are your father and mother?"

"My name you know," Amor said. "But let me confess at once, lest you should discover it in time after, that I was born out of wedlock. The noble Chivalry was my father, and Poetry my mother."

"Ah, brave old Chivalry." Harlequin cocked his head, finding as other men do that to concentrate his thoughts it was needful to make them run to one side. "I saw him often, long since, but not for many a year now."

"He is dead," Amor sighed. "And I, a neglectful daughter, ought to have said 'my late father' and not spoken as I did."

"What? Brave Chivalry late? But Chivalry cannot be late, or else 'tis not Chivalry."

"How truly you speak. No, that poor body cannot be my noble father, ever so light of step, even when he was stiff of knee. It is—what it is. But Chivalry was never so."

"As for Poetry," continued Harlequin. "She still lives, I believe; but she is old and crank and ill."

"I feared it might be thus. It has been so very long since last I saw her."

"Then you are alone in the world," Harlequin said, and made her a deep bow. "But not entirely alone, for you have me."

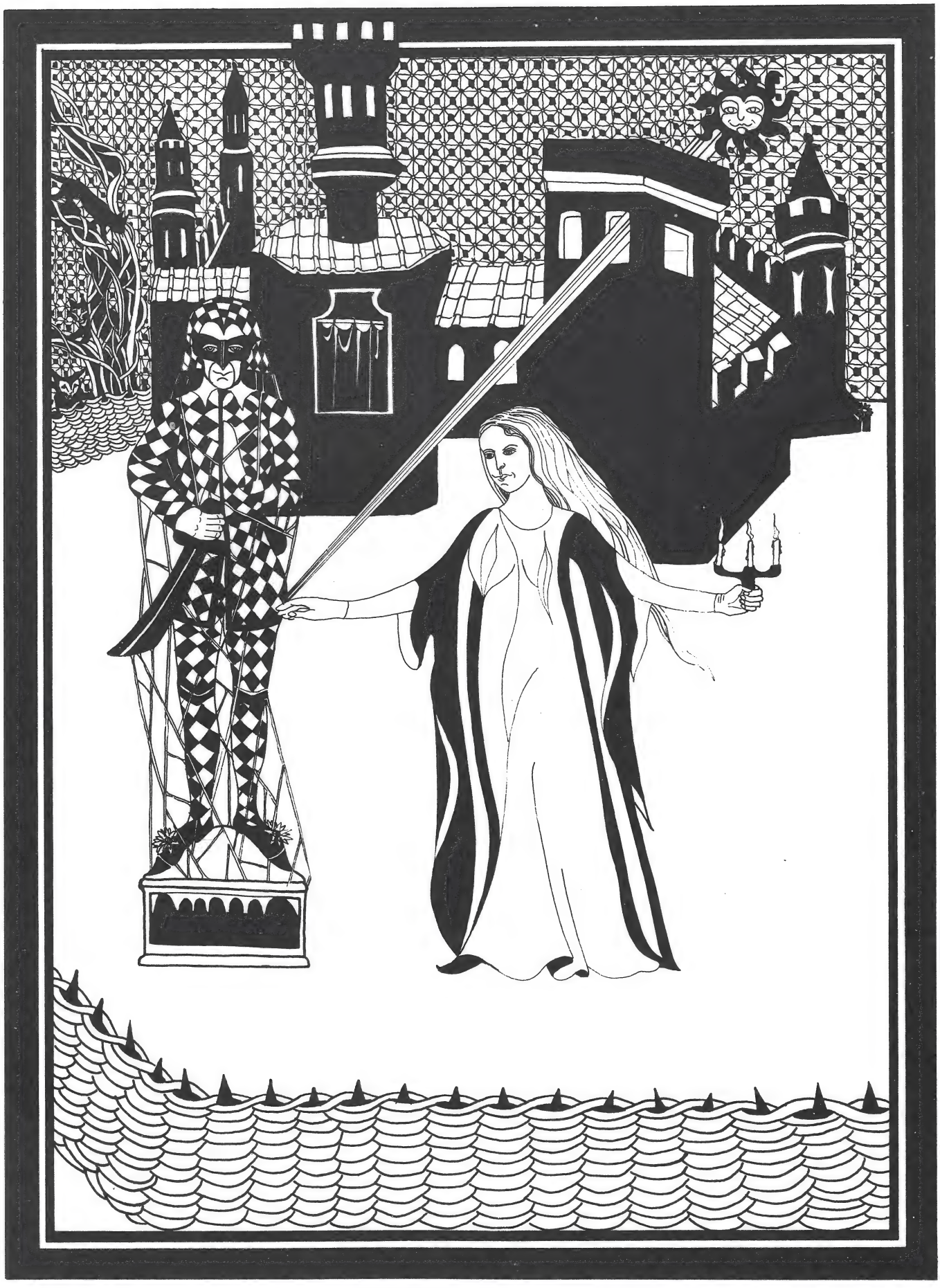
"And you," Amor said. "You are alone also."

"Indeed, I hope not."

She took him by the hand. "My dear friend—"

Fearing her words: "Your touch thrills me still. It was your touch, beloved Amor, that called me to life. I came down from that block of stone to feel your touch. There is true magic in your touch, I swear!"

"How could my touch kindle anything to life?"



Illustrated by Edith Hurry

He kissed her hand. "I cannot say—and yet I know it brought life to me."

"Shall we make a trial of it?" Amor inquired doubtfully. "If it were so, I might— I even might— Shall I touch another?"

"Oh, not another!" Harlequin gasped.

"Not another such as you, dear friend, for there is no other such as you. But should I not touch something else? Perhaps the dragon on that vase?"

"But suppose your touch effectual. We would have a dragon between us. Would that not be horrible?"

"And if it were not—"

"That would be more horrible still."

"What then? There is a painted mask upon that wall."

"Friend to you, he would prove a false friend. No, touch . . ."

"What?"

"Touch . . ."

"Yes?"

"The entire palace!"

"Everything? I cannot touch it all at once."

"You did not touch me all at once, but only in a single spot."

"I'll try," she said; and while Harlequin watched, she knelt upon the floor, embraced a column, and blew a kiss to the ceiling.

Nothing occurred.

"I knew it could not be," she said.

"I knew it could." He hung his head.

She took his hand again, and together they wandered down the many and dividing corridors that lead to the grave.

"It worked for me," he said.

"I know it did."

And the marble was white no longer, but flushed with rose.

She said, "It would have been a wondrous thing."

"It was, for me." And later, "It will always be."

As their footsteps echoed the ticking of the clocks in the benighted corridors, a new wind fluttered the candle flames and whispered to the dry stones there of rain in spring.

"It was joy even to fancy it," she said, "though it was only for a moment."

"It is true," he told her.

A daisy pushed its golden eye from between two blocks of marble. Harlequin nearly trod on it. "It's true! Amor, you can, you do! You did! Oh, Amor, don't you see? It only took longer because the palace is so huge."

"I do?" she asked. Then whispered, "I *did*." And with trembling hand touched her own heart.

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Gene Wolfe is 53 years old. He began publishing stories in the late 1960s, and is now regarded as one of America's most eminent writers of sf and fantasy. His "Book of the New Sun" tetralogy has brought him tremendous acclaim and many awards. He lives in Barrington, Illinois, where he recently gave up his job on the journal *Plant Engineering* in order to devote himself to writing full time.

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THE MALIGNANT ONE

Rachel Pollack

THE AWAKENING

Susanna came awake slowly, momentarily stranded between the crumpled sheets of the narrow and the long road of her dreams. She groaned and rubbed her eyes, then stretched out flat.

Suddenly she jerked around to find the clock. What time was it? Was it late? Had she forgotten the alarm? Susanna stared several seconds at the small electric alarm clock before her foggy mind registered the time. 8:30. The alarm wasn't set to go off until 9:00. She clicked off the button and flopped back against the crunched up pillows. An extra half hour. She could lie in bed for a while before she had to get up and get ready for her appointment.

She lurched up to fling open the heavy brown curtains. Rain. Shit. You'd think the world could have spared her a little sunshine for such an important day. Her hand rubbed the horns of the small plastic window guardian, then she leaped back in bed, thinking sleepy thoughts about breakfast and what to wear.

Her mind shifted to remembering her dream. Wild. She'd been trying to get to her mother's funeral — she was all excited because she'd see her brother James there — and a huge snake had blocked the road. She remembered thinking the snake was a Malignant One, but it had turned out just the opposite. The snake was Benign. It had saved her from falling into a dark hole in the middle of the street.

Susanna closed her eyes a moment. Was it a good sign to dream about a Benign One just before a job interview? Sleepily she recited the Standard Formula of Recognition. "Devoted One, I thank you for your devotion. I know that nothing I have done deserves your precious intervention."

She stretched under the covers. What would her mother say if Susanna told her about the dream funeral? Probably get all paranoid, accuse Susanna of trying to establish a reality configuration. She laughed, thinking she couldn't wait to tell James, she could call him later, after the interview.

James! How could she— Susanna sat up. She must have sunk further into that dream than she realized, if it made her forget the road accident that had killed her brother two years ago.

Two years. She reached over to the wooden nightstable for the computer calendar in its little brass stand. Sept. 15. What day was the accident? She couldn't remember, but the solar date didn't matter. Only the pattern date counted, and that depended— She jabbed a button and the calendar's circuits linked themselves to the great computer "soup" under the Founder's Institute in New York. The calendar's small screen lit up with the current stage in the year's progression. "The Old Lady washes her face. Cold water touches her tongue."

"Shit," Susanna said, and hit her fist against the mattress. Her desire to lie in bed vanished, and she stood up. As she slipped on her red terrycloth bathrobe and rolled up the droopy sleeves, she wondered if the conjunction of James's death date and her appointment at Creative Comics signalled a failure configuration. The oracle down at the county offices had given her a good reading, but she knew such local oracles weren't rated very highly. She wished she'd gone to New York to see the Great Speaker on the roof of the World Trade Center.

Maybe she should do a basic joining and then a few personal words of transformation. Or maybe the opposite, a deep release exercise in order to cut the whole thing loose, the dream, the pattern—

Or could she be looking at the conjunction the wrong way? She turned on the shower to heat up the bathroom, then sat down to piss. She bent forward, hugging her chest and letting her head droop down towards her knees. Maybe the conjunction signalled something positive. Not the death of her hopes but the death of her years as an isolated unknown. Maybe it meant she would get the job and enter a rebirth phase as a true

artist. A woman of power.

She slid open the glass door and stepped into the shower, where the hot water carried off some of her anxieties. "Whenever you take a bath," her teacher had told her and the other kids in spiritual training class, "imagine the power of the Founders washing away all your fears and worries." Susanna smiled. Good old Mr Cleveland. She remembered the time he invited her and Sally Cohen up to the school roof to look at the shifting spirit patterns created by the network of satellites passing in front of the stars. Once there he'd tried to get the two girls to take off their clothes. "You've got to let your skin feed on the heavenly lights," he'd told them. Susanna laughed. She poked at her nipple, stiff in the needle spray of the shower. "The Old Lady washes her tits," she said, and laughed again.

THE JOURNEY

Susanna checked herself once more in the mirror. She could still take off the yellow blouse and multicoloured pleated skirt, and put on, oh, her blue knit dress. It would look more sophisticated. But on the other hand, production managers could look sophisticated. An artist should look, what? Original? Sincere?

Enough. She glanced at the heap of clothes on the bed, then sat down to zip up her red boots. It's got to go well, she thought. It's got to. One more check in the mirror, a rub at a speck of mascara under her left eye, and then she was belting her plastic raincoat and mumbling various formulas for a safe transition from the internal world of her apartment to the shared universe of the street. In the living room she picked up her portfolio wrapped in double plastic bags. All her best drawings lay in there, both the traditional line scenes and her more recent experimental work.

In the early years after the Revolution comic books had experienced a creative torrent, partly because a number of the Founders had been admirers of old world comics. It was a time of experimentation, when artists and writers tried everything, panels that went on for pages, audible dialogue without pictures, tiny split brain drawings that made no sense until you pressed the two parts directly against your eyes. But as society settled down, as new institutions solidified, so comic books, and in fact, all the arts, had exchanged exploration for orthodoxy.

Susanna believed she could open up—well, help open up this narrowness. She was twenty-eight, well past the usual age for beginning artists. She hadn't wasted her time, though. For ten years she'd worked alone on her drawings, not perfecting her style but going deeper into it. Her images bore a raw unfinished quality, prodding the mind to complete them. Often great blocks and smudges of colour appeared between the panels, or even broke them up, like the hidden chaos of reality smashing its way into the illusion of everyday life.

Susanna believed in her work. Now she just had to get Carl Benton at Creative Comics to believe in it.

Outdoors, in the quiet suburban steet of two-family homes and small apartment buildings, the rain pelted the few cars heading to or from town. Soggy leaves covered the sidewalk and lawns. Susanna started off for the bus stop, enjoying the pull in her muscles as she stretched her long legs. She was delighted that she didn't have to travel all the way to New York. In response to his yearly reading with the oracle Benton had moved his executive offices to Susanna's own small city. She wondered if she would have found the courage—

"Damn!" Susanna grunted in pain as she bent down to rub her twisted ankle. She glared at the beer can lying beside her. "Who put that thing here?" she said out loud. How could people just leave things lying on the sidewalk like that? She winced when she stood, but after a moment she found she could put enough weight on her foot to limp—carefully—along the street.

She turned the corner to the bus stop just in time to see the old green bus rumble away from the kerb. "Hey," she shouted. "Wait." She tried to run after it but gave it up after two painful steps.

Susanna sat down heavily on the wooden bench in the three-sided glass shelter. She snarled at the two-foot high concrete statue of a winged guardian in flight. All journeys re-enact the journey of the mind through the mysteries of creation. Anyway, that's what they taught you in school. "Why didn't you tell it to wait for me?" she said. The enamelled eyes stared upwards at the heavy clouds.

She bent down to give her ankle another rub. She hadn't seriously sprained it; the pain was already fading. At least she could rest. Another bus would come in about fifteen minutes. Great, she thought, I give myself lots of extra time so now I get to sit here.

The rain thickened. The wind drove great gusts of it down the road like refugees. Susanna found herself getting sleepy. She slumped down on the bench until her legs stuck out from the shelter. The rattle of the rain on her boots made her eyelids droop even further. So sleepy— How could anyone stay awake in such— The Old Lady washes—

She opened her eyes to see the doors of another bus sliding shut. She jumped up and knocked on the plastic window. For a moment the driver looked like he was going to ignore her, but then he shrugged theatrically and opened the doors.

"Thank you," Susanna said, climbing up the rubber steps.

Peevishly the driver told her, "I held them open for half a minute, you know." The doors began to wheeze shut again.

"Oh, wait a second," Susanna cried. "Wait. Please." She leaped off, trying to hold on to the bus so it couldn't get away. There, on the soaked and muddy sidewalk, lay her portfolio. She scooped it up and shook off the excess water.

"Hey, what's that?" the driver said. "Your wedding pictures?" He laughed loudly.

Susanna sat down in one of the hard plastic seats. Carefully she stripped off the outer bag from her precious cardboard folder. Okay. It was okay. She sagged back. If she'd ruined her drawings she would have assigned herself some wretched penance, like a pilgrimage to one of those cold caves in Virginia, where the only light came from the fluorescent skulls

Illustrated by Ian Sanderson

glued to the walls. But it was okay. She was safe.

On the way into town, Susanna stared out the window, watching the shopping centres and gas stations, the golf course and Public Labyrinth, float by in a haze of rain. Every few minutes she checked her watch. Plenty of time. She'd still be a little early.

Just past the city limits the bus slowed, and kept slowing until it was creeping along at less than five miles per hour. Susanna half stood to peer through the windshield at a long line of cars. "What's wrong?" she said loudly.

The driver didn't answer, but one of the other passengers called back, "It's patron day at the Civic Centre. The TV said they're mounting a fullscale procession. Marches through the street, enactments, the whole thing."

"In this weather?" someone else said. "I hope they score another miracle. They deserve it."

The Civic Centre had taken as its patron Janwillem Singing Rock, due to a marvel performed by the Founder on that very spot. Early in the Revolution the town's mayor, loyal to the secular government, had ordered the fire department to burn down an old apartment building whose residents had flown a banner supporting the insurrection. When the Army of Saints had taken the town and safely caged the mayor in an iron box, Janwillem Singing Rock came to visit the site of the fire. A few drops of coffee spilled from his cup and within minutes a great tree had grown, displaying in its bark the faces of the martyrs. The architects who designed the Civic Centre cut down the tree, but used its wood for a twelve-foot statue of Singing Rock and his coffee cup.

Last year Susanna had joined the crowd watching the march of thirteen-year old girls carrying a styrofoam replica of the statue through the streets around the Centre. Now, she only sat in her seat wishing they'd all go drown somewhere.

Behind her a voice saud "Doesn't look like we'll ever get through." Susanna turned to see a middle-aged man leaning forward with his arms on the back of the seat next to her. At first glance, he appeared somewhat elegant, with his thick grey hair, his long thin nose and graceful fingers, his heavy black overcoat. A closer look and everything turned a little shabby. The hair needed a wash to get the grease and dandruff out, the nose had a sore on one side, the finger-nails were broken or chipped, and the overcoat had worn through along the collar and elbows. And yet, his easy grin relaxed Susanna. She thought of the spinning pastel mandalas they showed on afternoon television to calm little kids before dinner.

The man said, "Anyone stupid enough to go out in this kind of weather is stupid enough to stay out all day in it."

Susanna laughed. "Please don't say that. I've got to make an appointment."

"You'll never make it sitting here."

"Do you think so?" She stood up to try and see the road ahead. Still nothing but cars. Somewhere in the distance she heard the blast of trumpets. "It must be blocks away," she said.

"If I was you, I'd walk."

"How can I? It's all the way across town."

"You could hike a few streets over. Then you could take another bus, or maybe a cab." His voice, though a little rough, rode gently up and down her nerves, soothing the raw edges.

"I guess so," she said, and then suddenly the bus had pulled up at a stop and she found herself stepping off with the greyhaired man beside her. Almost as soon as the bus had rolled away the traffic began to clear. Susanna stood there a moment, feeling like a little child about to cry, but then she tied the hood of her raincoat tightly under his chin and hurried after her companion.

At least he seemed to know where he was going. Despite the rain he walked casually, with his hands in his frayed pockets. Occasionally he gave a kind of foggy whistle.

THE STANDARD FORMULAS

Their route twisted in and out of faceless streets of uniform six-storey apartment buildings, through a part of town Susanna knew only vaguely. It didn't take long before she'd lost all sense of the way they'd come. "Will we get to a bus soon?" she asked.

"Any moment," he told her.

"I'm feeling really tired. I twisted my ankle before, and it's starting to hurt again." She wished she didn't sound like such a complainer. She really did want to sit down, though, get out of the rain. Her arms had started to ache from holding the large portfolio, and she found herself thinking she'd just like to drop it somewhere. She could always pick it up later.

They emerged from the tangle of streets onto a slightly wider avenue, where a trickle of lower middle-class shoppers hurried in and out of a supermarket and a few small stores. "What bus goes here?" Susanna asked. She tried to look for a sign but the rain streaming down her face made it hard to see.

Her companion laughed. "You're going to get on a bus like that? You're a mess. You better dry out first."

"But I can't." She felt so tired. She just wanted to go somewhere warm. Sit down, close her eyes for a moment.

The grey-haired man smiled, showing yellow teeth with black stains along the edge of the gums. "There's a luncheonette over there. Why don't I buy you a coffee, something to eat?" Before Susanna could answer he had taken her arm and was pulling her along past a cleaners and a store selling used amulets and totems. Susanna knew she shouldn't go with him, there wasn't time, but somehow she couldn't make herself care. A cup of coffee sounded so wonderful.

They entered a small diner with a faded sign in the window announcing it as Glowwood Grill. Susanna touched a fingertip to the portrait of Mirando Glowwood set into the door frame, but when she tried to think of the formula for entering a public building her mind blanked. She shrugged and followed her host to one of the square wooden tables with chipped red formica tops. They sat down on wooden chairs.

Along the back ran a counter and some stools where a couple of teenage boys sat reading magazines while they ate their sandwiches. At one of the tables an old woman in a man's green raincoat stared at a coffee cup. At another a man and a woman about forty argued in hushed tones about money. There were no other

customers. The place smelled of old cooking oil, but Susanna didn't care. It was warm and dry.

A tall thick-shouldered waitress with very short hair and a stained white uniform came and gave their table a perfunctory wipe. She handed them large cardboard menus adorned with embossed pictures of Mirando Glowwood's Miracle of the Chocolates.

The man plucked the menu from Susanna's hand before she'd even opened it. "My friend's in a hurry," he said. "So we'll just order, okay?"

The waitress shrugged. "Sure."

They both looked at Susanna, who said, "Uh, a hamburger. I guess. And coffee." She didn't know why she'd said that. The coffee, sure, but the last thing she wanted was a hamburger.

"Milk and sugar?" the waitress asked.

"Uh, yeah. Okay."

The waitress looked at the grey-haired man. He said, "I'll just take a cup of tea. And a nice thick slice of lemon." He winked at Susanna. "Good old vitamin C. Keeps you alert."

Susanna had never felt less alert in her life. The hot luncheonette, with its window all steamed up, made her even more drowsy than before. Her companion was talking to her, but she hardly heard him.

The food came. Susanna lifted the sesame bun and sprinkled salt on the small dried-out piece of meat. She took a bite. The hamburger was lukewarm, the bun stale. She put it down and made a face. When she sipped the coffee she thought she could taste soap. "Food's not very good here," she said.

The man sat half turned sideways, with his legs crossed. Idly he rotated his spoon in his tea. Susanna tried to focus on his face, but the steam from the tea kept throwing a mist in front of him. "No," he said, "the food's pretty poor here." He turned to face her and uncrossed his legs. Leaning forward, he opened his mouth very wide. Staring at the darkness beyond his teeth Susanna began to sweat.

He smiled, and then he said, "Would you like me to devour you?"

"What?" Susanna recoiled. "What are you talking about?"

He leaned back now, grinning like someone who's pulled off a great practical joke without the victim ever catching on. "Haven't you guessed?" he said, and Susanna shook her head, half crying. "I'm a Malignant One. I've been tracking you all day, since before you woke up. And now—well, now I've got you, haven't I?"

Susanna forced the words from her terrified body. "Ferocious One, I beg you to release me. Nothing I have done deserves your destructive intervention."

He laughed, a roar in the quiet diner. "Susanna, Susanna, spare me your little formulas. *Standard Recognition*. Am I a standard experience? Am I?"

"What are you going to do to me?" Stories of attacks by Malignant Ones flitted through her mind. Women with ugly bloated bodies. Blind children flying through the air like insects.

The Bright Being grinned. "Do to you? I've already done it. Look at the clock."

Her eyes followed the tilt of his head to an old electric clock mounted on the wall above the grimy counter. Rings of symbols for both the transcendence and the total embracing of time surrounded the clock

face, but Susanna only stared at the thick black hands. In her mind she could see Carl Benton looking at his watch and crossing her name off a list. She knew the vision was real, or would be in a very short time. "Why?" she said. "What do you care if I get a job or not?"

The Being took a pack of cigarettes from the pocket of his coat. Jauntily he laid the end in his mouth, then flicked a match from a paper matchbook. "You people," he said, "never see the consequences of your actions. You worry all the time about the future, but you never actually examine it."

"I don't understand."

"There's a man working at Creative Comics. I'll tell you his name if you like. Allan Friedman. A writer. If you'd made your appointment today, you'd probably have gone to work there. Eventually you and Allan Friedman would have collaborated."

"But why do you care about that?"

He tried to blow a smoke ring but he must not have practised very much for it broke up as soon as it left his pursed lips. He frowned a moment, then said, "The standard answer, of course, is that I don't care. I act for my own amusement." Susanna nodded, remembering her lessons. The Beings, malignant and benign, manipulated the world for their own purposes. To them humans were simply a field of play. But the Ferocious One went on, "The fact is, darling Susanna, in this case I care very much." He frowned, and pursed his lips. "Do you know Li Ku's Story of the Two Lamps?"

Confused, Susanna nodded.

"Then you'll remember how the man and woman each owned an oil lamp too weak and spluttering to light up their separate rooms. But when they met in the hallway and poured the oil together, the blaze ignited the whole rooming house."

"And then their bodies burned off, leaving them free to fly away from the cold country."

"Nicely put. Well, you and Allan Friedman are like those two sputtering lamps. And this world of yours is a country grown safely cold again."

Susanna made a noise. She shook her head, very slightly.

The Being said, "The Revolution was a bad time for me and my kind. You people had all shed your old skins and we couldn't get hold of you. But now a nice hard crust has grown again. Churches are back, the Founder's Tales have all received official interpretations, the mass ecstasies have ended—"

"But what—"

"If you and Friedman had worked together you might have burned away some of the crust. Not much. But enough to make me uncomfortable. You see, Susanna, I'm not too fond of human liberation."

Did he mean it? Susanna thought. Was he serious? Excitement, regret, anger, fear rattled her like a shook piggy bank. "I can still— I can find him, I can show him my portfolio."

"It wouldn't mean anything to him. You'd have to work together for a while. Besides, Benton's got him under exclusive contract." He puffed on his cigarette. "Too bad, kid. Some things just have to come together in their proper place and time."

Susanna glanced quickly at the clock, then down at her wrist where the digital readout emerged from the mouth of the Mexican goddess engraved on the surface. The clock was fast! *And the Ferocious One didn't realize it.* Time confused Bright Beings. They weren't used to it. If she could get away, right now, find a cab, or someone to help her she could still get there only a few minutes late. Carl Benton would understand. He'd have to understand. And then she and Allan Friedman would meet. And work together.

If she could get away.

Just have to stand up, she thought. She tried to push up with her hands on the wooden chair arms, but the more she pressed down, the more leaden her body became. Her mind slowed. What was she trying to do? Everything had become so confused. She was gulping air and forgetting to expel any. Staring down at her hands, she remembered she wanted to stand, it was very important to get up, to run, but she couldn't possibly think of why. Or how. None of her muscles would coordinate with any of the others. Possibly, if she concentrated very hard, she could manage to push with her legs, or press with her hands, but she couldn't do them together. Or manage to keep her back straight while she was doing either one.

With an explosion of breath Susanna gave up her attempt to stand. Her body sagged, trembling with exhaustion. As her head cleared depression rushed in. So he did know. The fast clock, even his explanation—they were just part of the game.

"Stay a while," the Malignant One said, waving his cigarette. "No need to rush off." He laughed. "Would you like another coffee? How about a Danish?" He leaned forward. "Probably stale, but what the hell, it's bound to be better than the hamburger." He looked for the waitress. She was walking by with a bowl of soup, but turned when she saw the Malignant One's waving fingers.

"Yes sir?" she said, but before her customer could say anything the waitress slid on a grease spot on the floor. Automatically her arms flailed out for balance and the soup leaped through the air to coat the Ferocious One's chest and lap with thick green muck. Little pieces of sausage dribbled down his shirt.

"You stupid bitch!" he shouted. "What the Death is the matter with you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I'm sorry." She pulled a couple of filthy rags from her front pockets and began wiping the Being's chest.

"Get away," he told her. "Just get away from me," but she paid no attention. The more he tried to push her aside the more she managed to slip under his arms to slap her big hands all over his body.

The Malignant One leaped to his feet. "Leave me alone," he shouted, and shoved her as hard as he could. Or tried to. With no apparent plan the waitress bent down just as the hands came towards her. The Malignant One toppled forward, falling on her, and now, as he tried to get up, the frightened woman's thrashing about kept pulling him down.

Susanna jumped to her feet and ran for the door. "You," the Ferocious One ordered, "Come back here." But his voice had lost its hypnotic force. It sounded like some frustrated salesman who's had a day where nothing's gone right. At the door, about to

recite the formula of transition for crossing a threshold, Susanna stopped and glanced back to see the waitress looking at her. The tiredness had vanished and a light played about the face, enhancing the deep eyes, the smooth planes of the cheeks. Against the brilliant black of her skin the uniform blazed with white. Susanna said, "Thank you, Devoted One—" but then the vision passed, and the woman became a frustrated waitress again, all tangled up with an angry customer.

In the street the rain had stopped. Susanna ran, with her drawings in their plastic bag held against her chest. At the end of the block she saw a cab driver leaning against his parked cab. Without a word she got in and slammed the door.

"Hey," the driver said, "I'm off duty."

"Please," Susanna begged. "I've got to get to Creative Comics. I'll pay you double. Please help me."

The cab driver shrugged and got in front. "That's an offer I can't refuse," he said as the engine coughed itself awake. "Hang on." In one smooth arc he turned the car around and headed in the opposite direction. Despite honks and a few squeals of brakes the car slid smoothly into traffic.

"You know which way to go?" Susanna asked.

"Creative Comics, you said."

"But how do you know—"

"We'll be there in no time."

Susanna looked from the man's innocuous picture on his identification plate to his even more innocuous presence behind the wheel. Was he a power? And if so, on which side? She thought they were going in the right direction, but how could she be sure?

Her left hand reached out to close around the small totem mounted on the door above the handle. It calmed her to feel the sharp wings cutting into her fingers. "Guardian of the road," she said, "take me to the heart of my desire."

"Relax, lady," the cab driver said. "We'll be there in no time. No time at all." The car glided smoothly through the wet streets.

Rachel Pollack wrote "Angel Baby," which appeared in our second issue. She lives in Amsterdam, and has published a novel, *Golden Vanity* (1980), as well as various non-fiction books. "The Malignant One" is an independent story set against the same imaginative background as her latest novel.

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The Dream of the Wolf

Scott Bradfield

Without the dream one would have found no occasion for a division of the world.
— Nietzsche

"Last night I dreamed I was *Canis lupus tundarum*, the Alaskan tundra wolf," Larry Chambers said, confronted by hot Cream of Wheat, one jelly donut, black coffee with sugar. "I was surrounded by a vast white plain, a few sparse grey patches of vegetation. I loped along at a brisk pace, quickening the hot pulse of my blood. I felt extraordinarily swift, hungry, powerful . . ." Larry gripped his donut; red jelly squirted across his knuckles. "My jaws were enormous, my paws heavy and calloused." He took a bite, chewed with his mouth open. "My pelt was thick and white and warm. The cold breeze carried aromas of fox, rabbit, caribou, rodent, fowl, mollusc . . ."

"Caroline!" Sherryl Chambers reached for a damp dish cloth. "Eat over the table, *please*. Just look at this. You've dripped cereal all over your new shoes."

Caroline gazed up intently at her father, her chin propped against the edge of the table. Her fist gripped a grainy spoon.

"I heard a noise behind me and I turned." Larry warmed his palms against the white coffee cup. "The mouse hesitated — just for a moment — and quickly I pounced, pinned him beneath my paw. His eyes were wide with panic, his tiny heart fluttered wildly. His fear blossomed in the air like pollen —"

"What did you do, Daddy? What did you do to the mouse?"

Larry absently observed the clock radio. *KRQQ helicopter-watch for a Monday, March twenty-third,* the radio said. *An over-turned tanker trunk has traffic backed up all the way to the Civic Centre . . .*

"I ate him," Larry said. The time was eight-fifteen.

"Caroline. Finish your cereal before it gets cold."

"But Daddy's a wolf again, Mommy. He caught a mouse and he *ate* it."

"I'm practically certain it was the *tundarum*," Larry said, and pulled on his sports coat.

"Please, Caroline. I won't ask you again."

"But I want the rest of Daddy's donut."

"Finish your cereal. *Then* we'll discuss Daddy's donut."

"I think I'll stop by the library again tonight." Larry got up from the table. His spoon lay gripped by the thickening cereal, like a fossil in La Brea.

"Sure, honey. And pick up some milk on the way home, will you? *Try* and remember."

"I will," Larry said, "I'll try," recalling the brilliant white ice, the warm easy taste of the blood.

"And here — bend over." Sherryl moistened the tip of a napkin with her lips. "There's jelly all over your face."

"It's the blood, Daddy. It's the mouse's blood."

"Thanks," Larry said, and went into the living room.

Caroline watched the kitchen door swing shut. After a moment she heard the front door open and close.

"Daddy forgot to kiss me goodbye," she said.

Sherryl spilled pots and pans into the sink. "Daddy's a little preoccupied this morning, dear."

Caroline thought for a moment. The bitten jelly donut sat in the middle of the table like a promise. "Daddy ate a mouse," she said finally, and made a proud little flourish in the air with her spoon.

Canis lupus youngi, canis lupus crassodon, canis niger rufus, Larry thought, and boarded the RTD at Beverly and Fairfax. The wolf, he thought. The wolf of the dream, the wolf of the world. He showed the driver his pass. Wolves in Utah, Northern Mexico, Baffin Island, even Hollywood. Wolves secretly everywhere, he thought, and made his way down the crowded aisle. Elderly women jostled fitfully in their seats, like birds on a wire.

"Larry! Hey — *Spaceman*!"

Andrew Prytowsky waved his *Wall Street Journal*. "Sit here." He removed his briefcase from the window seat, held it in his lap. "Rest that frazzled brain of

yours — you may need it later."

"Thanks," Larry said, squeezed into the vacant seat, and recalled an exotic afternoon nap. *Canis lupus chanco*, the Tibetan late spring, crepuscular hour. His pack downed a goat. As they fed, blood spattered the gray dust like droplets of quivering mercury.

"*That's* earnings, Larry. *That's* reliable income. *That's* retirement security, a summer cottage, a sporty new car." Andrew shook the American Exchange at him, as if reproving an unhousebroken puppy. "Fifteen points in two weeks. Did you hear me? *Fifteen points*! Just like I promised — Consolidated Plastics Ink. Plastic bullets, the weapon of the future, I told you. Cheap, easy to manufacture, minimal production overhead. You could have cut yourself a piece of that. I certainly gave you the opportunity. But then *my* word's not good enough for you. You've already got your savings account, your fixed interest, your automatic teller, your free promotional albums. You've got yourself a coffin — *that's* what you've got. Fixed interest is gonna bury you. *Listen* to me, Larry. I can help. Let's talk tax-free municipal bonds for just one second —"

Larry sighed and stared out the smudged window. Outside the Natural History Museum sidewalk vendors sold hot dogs, lemonade and pretzels. Behind them, ancient bones surfaced occasionally from the bubbling tarpit.

"— in the long run we're not just talking safety. We're talking variable income *and* easy liquidity." Prytowsky slapped the newspaper against Larry's chest. "Get *with* it, Spaceman. What are you, now? Late thirties, early forties? You want to spend the rest of your life with your head in the clouds? Or do you want to come down to earth and enjoy a little of the *good* life? Your little girl — Carol, Karen, whatever. She may be four or five now, but college is *tomorrow*, Spaceman. *Tomorrow*. And you want your little girl to go to college, don't you? Well, *don't* you? Of *course* you do! Of *course*!"

The traffic light turned green, the RTD's clutch connected with a sudden sledgehammer sound. Oily gray smoke swirled outside the window.

"And what about that devilish little wife of yours? Take it from me, Spaceman. A woman's eye is *always* seeking those greener pastures. It's not their *fault*, Spaceman — it's just their *nature* . . . Hey, Larry." The rolled up newspaper jabbed at Larry's side. "You even listening to me or what?"

"Sure," Larry said. The bus passed into Beverly Hills. Exorbitant hood ornaments flashed in the sun like grails. "Easy liquidity, interest variations. I'll think about it, I really will. It's just I have a lot on my mind right now, that's all." *Canis lupus arabs, pallipes, baileyi, nubilis, monstrabilis*, he thought. The wolves, the wolves of the dream, the wolves of the world.

"Still having those nutty dreams of yours, Spaceman? Your wife told my wife. You dream you're a dog or something?"

"A wolf. *Canis lupus*. It's not even the same subspecies as a dog."

"Oh." Andrew discarded his paper under the seat. "Sure."

"Wolves are far more intelligent than any dog. They are fiercer hunters, loyaler mates. Their social organization alone —"

"Yeah, *sure*, Spaceman. I stand corrected. I'll bet in your dreams you really raise hell with those stupid dogs — hey, Larry, old pal?" Andrew said, lifted his briefcase, and disboarded at Westwood Boulevard.

As the bus approached 27th Street Larry moved back through the crowd of passengers who stood and sat around with newspapers, magazines and detached expressions as they vacantly chewed Certs, peanuts from a bag, impassive bubble-gum, like a herd of grazing buffalo while the wolf, the wolf of Larry's mind, roamed casually amongst them, searching out the weak, the sickly, the injured, the ones who always betrayed themselves with a brief and anxious glance — the elderly woman with the aluminium walker, the gawky adolescent with the bad complexion and the crooked teeth. Wolves in Tibet, Montana, South America, Micronesia. The expanse of the wilderness, the map of the sky, the spoor of the prey, Larry thought, disembarked at 29th Street and entered Tower Tire and Rubber Company, Incorporated. He showed his pass to the security guard, then rode the humming elevator to the twelfth floor. When Larry stepped into the foyer the secretaries, gathered round the receptionist's desk, exchanged quick, significant expressions, like secret memoranda. Larry heard them giggling as he disappeared into the maze of high white partitions that organized the office cubicles like the discrete cells of an ant farm.

Larry entered his office.

"Ready for Monday?" Marty Cabrillo asked.

Larry hung his coat on the rack, turned.

The Marketing Supervisor stood in front of Larry's aluminium bookshelf, gazing aimlessly at the spines of large gray Acco-Grip binders. "Frankly," he said, "I'd rather be back in Shasta. How was your weekend?"

"Fine, just fine," Larry said, walked around his desk and sat down. He opened the top desk drawer.

"I thought I'd drop by and see if the Orange County sales inventory was ready. Didn't mean to barge in, you know."

"Certainly. Help yourself." Larry gestured equivocally with his right hand, rummaged in the desk drawer with his left.

"Ed Conklin called from Costa Mesa Friday. He said he still hasn't received the Goodyear flyer. I told him no problem — you'd get in touch. Right?"

"Right." Larry slammed the drawer shut and pulled open another. "No problem . . . Here we are." He removed a large faded green hardcover book. One of the book's corners was slightly bloated with dogeared pages. Larry wiped off the dust and bits of paper against his trousers. *The Wolves of North America: Part I, Classification of Wolves*.

Marty propped one hand casually in his pocket. "Don't take this the wrong way or anything, Larry . . . I mean, I'm not trying to pull rank on you or anything. But maybe you could try being just a little bit more careful the next few weeks or so. Think of it as a friendly warning, okay?"

Larry looked up from his book.

"It's not me, Larry." Marty placed his hand emphatically over his heart. "You know me, right? But the district managers — some of them have started to complain. Late orders, unitemized bills, stuff like that. Most of the time I can cover for you. But the guys

upstairs aren't so patient. I'm just trying to say that it's my job, too. That's all I'm trying to say."

Finally Larry located the *tundarum*'s sub-species guide. *Type Locality: Point Barrow, Alaska. Type Specimen: No. 16748, probably female, skull only, U.S. National Museum; collected by Lt. P.H. Ray . . .*

"But for God's sake don't take it personal or anything. It's not even that serious, right? Everybody has their off-periods. People get . . . well, *distracted*."

"I knew it," Larry said, and pointed at the page. "Just what I thought. Look — *tundarum* is 'closely allied to *pambisileus*.' That's what it says — exactly as I suspected. The dentition was a dead giveaway."

Marty fumbled for a cigarette from his shirt pocket, a Bic lighter from his slacks. "Well," he said, and took a long drag from his Kool. Then, after a moment, "You know, Larry, Beatrice and I have always been interested in this ecology stuff, too. You should visit our cabin in Shasta sometime. There's nothing like it — the clean air, the trees, the privacy. We joined the Sierra Club just last year . . . But look, we've *both* got to get back to work, right?" Marty paused outside the cubicle. "We'll get together and talk about this over lunch sometime, okay? And maybe you could drop the sales inventory by my office later? When it turns up? Before noon, maybe?"

That night Larry returned home after the dinner dishes had been washed. He glanced in Caroline's room. She was asleep. A pack of stuffed wolves, cubs, and one incongruous unicorn lay toppled around her on the bed like dominoes. He found Sherryl in the master bedroom, applying Insta-Curls to her hair and balancing a black rectangular apparatus in her lap.

Larry sat on the edge of the bed, glimpsed himself in the vanity mirror. He had forgotten to shave that morning. His eyes were dark, sunken, feral. (The lone wolf lopes rythmically across an empty plain. Late afternoon, a clear blue sky. The pale crescent moon appears on the horizon like a spectre. Other wolves howl in the distance.)

Larry turned to his wife. "I went all the way out to the UCLA research library, then found out the school's between quarters. The library closed at five.

"That's too bad, dear. Would you plug that in for me?"

Sherryl pulled a plastic cap onto her head. Two coiled black wires attached the cap to the black rectangular box. Larry connected the plug to the wall socket and the black box began to hum. Gradually the plastic cap inflated. "Larry, I wish I knew how to phrase this more delicately, but it's been on my mind a lot lately." Sherryl turned the page of a K-Mart Sweepstakes Sale brochure. "There are actually people in this world who like to talk about something besides *wolves* every once in a while."

Larry turned again to his reflection. He had forgotten to finish the inventory for Cabrillo. Tomorrow, he assured himself. First thing.

"I remember when we had decent conversations. We went out occasionally. We went to movies, we went dancing. Do you know the last time I even got out of the house for an evening? It was that horrid PTA meeting, with that dreadful woman — the hunchback with the butterfly glasses, you remember? Something about a rummage sale and new tether poles? Do you know how long ago that was?"

Larry ran his hand lightly along the smooth edge of the humming black box. "Look, honey. I know I get a little out of hand sometimes . . . I *know* that. Especially lately." He placed his hand on his forehead. He felt a bit feverish. A soft pressure increased inside his skull, like the inflating plastic cap. "I've been forgetful . . . and I realize I seem a little nutty at times . . ." The wolves, he thought, hoping to strengthen himself. The call of the pack, the track of the moon, the hot quick pulse of the blood. But the wolves abruptly seemed very far away. "I know you don't understand. *I* don't really understand . . . But these aren't just dreams. When I'm a wolf, I'm *real*. The places I see, the feelings I feel — they're *real*. As real as I am now talking to you. As real as this bed." He grasped the King-Size silk comforter. "I'm not making all this up . . . And I'll *try* to be a little more thoughtful. We'll go out to dinner this weekend, I promise. But try putting up with me a little longer. Give me a little credit, that's all . . ."

Sherryl glanced up. She took the humming black box from his hand.

"Did you say something, hon?" She patted the plastic cap. "Hold on and I'll be finished in a minute." She turned another page of the brochure. Then, with a heavy red felt marker, she circled the sale-price of Handi-Wipes.

Larry walked into the bathroom and brushed his gleaming white teeth.

"Last night I dreamed of the Pleistocene."

"Where is that, Daddy?"

"It's not a place, honey. It's a time. A long time ago."

"Dinosaurs, Daddy? Did you dream you were a *dinosaur*?"

"No, darling. The dinosaurs were all gone by then. I was *canis dirus*, I think. I'll check on it. The tundra was far colder and more desolate than before. The sky was filled with a weird, reddish glow I've never seen before, like the atmosphere of some alien planet. Ice was everywhere. Three of us remained in the pack. My mate had died the previous night, beneath a shelf of ice, while the rest of us huffled around to keep her warm. Dominant, I led the others across the white ice, my tail slightly erect. We were terribly cold, tired, hungry . . ."

"Weren't there any mice, Daddy? Or any snails?"

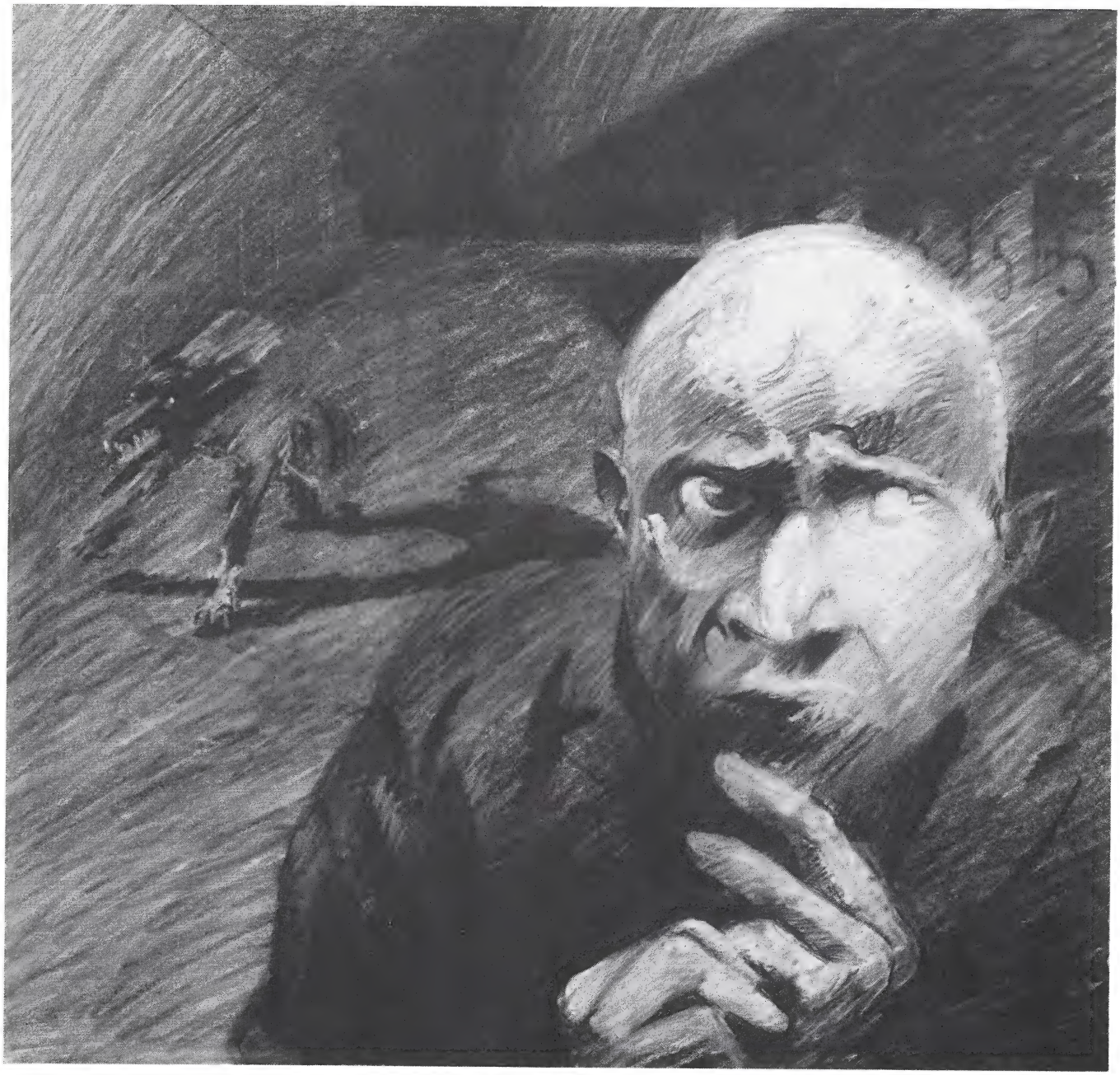
"No. We had travelled for days. We had discovered no spoor. Except one."

"Was it a deer, Daddy? Did you kill the deer and eat it?"

"No. It was Man's spoor. We were seeking an encampment of men." He turned. Sherryl was beating eggs into a bowl and watching David Hartman on the portable television. "Sherryl, that was the strangest part. I've read about it, anthropologists have suggested it — a prehistoric, communal bond between man and wolf. We weren't afraid. We sought shelter with them, food, companionship, allies in the hunt."

Larry watched his wife. After a moment she said, "That's nice, dear."

David Hartman said, "Later in this hour we'll be meeting Lorna Backus to discuss her new hit album, and then take an idyllic trip up the coast to scenic New



Illustrated by David Price

Hampshire, the Garden State, as part of our States of the Union series. Please stay with us."

"I've always wanted to live in New Hampshire," Sherryl said.

Every day on his way home from work Larry stopped at the Fairfax branch library. Many of the books he needed had to be requested through interlibrary loan. He read Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men*, Fox's *The Soul of the Wolf*, Mech's *The Wolf: the Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species*, Pimlott's *The World of the Wolf*, Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf*, Ewer's *The Carnivores*, and the pertinent articles and symposiums in *American Zoologist, American Scientist, Journal of Zoology, Journal of Mammalogy*, and *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. Sherryl pulled the blankets off the bed and three books came loose, thudded onto the floor. "I'd really appreciate it, Larry, if you could start picking up after yourself. It's bad enough with Caroline. And just look — this one's almost a month overdue." Larry returned it to the library that night, checked out three more, and xeroxed the "Canids" article in *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*.

On the way out the door he noticed a three-by-five file card tacked to the Community Billboard. *Spiritual Counselling, Dream Analysis, Budget Rates, Free Parking*. Her name was Anita Louise. She lived on the top floor of a faded Sunset Boulevard brownstone, and claimed to be circuitously related to Tina Louise, the former star of *Gilligan's Island*. Her living room was furnished with tattered green lawn chairs and orange-crate bookshelves. She required a personal item; Larry handed her his watch. She closed her eyes. "I can see the wolf now," she said. Her fingers smudged the watch's crystal face, wound the stem, tested the flexible metal band. "While he leads you through the forest of life, he warns you of the thorny paths. When the time comes, he will lead you into Paradise."

"The wolf doesn't guide me," Larry said. "I *am* the wolf. Sometimes *I* am the guide, the leader of my pack."

"The ways of the spirit world are often baffling to those unlearned in its ways," Anita told him. "I take Visa and Master-Card."

Before he left, Larry reminded her about his watch.

"I don't know, Evelyn. I really just don't know. I mean, I *love* Larry and all, but you can't imagine how difficult life's been around here the last few months." Sherryl held the telephone receiver with her left hand, a cold coffee cup with her right. She listened for a moment. "No, Evelyn. I don't think *you* understand. This isn't a hobby. It's not as if Larry was collecting stamps, or a *bowler* or something. I could understand that. *That* would be understandable. But all Larry ever talks about anymore is wolves. Wolves this and wolves that. Wolves at the dinner table, wolves in bed, wolves even when we're driving to the market. Wolves are everywhere, he keeps saying. And honestly, Evelyn, sometimes I almost believe him. I start looking over my shoulder. I hear a dog bark and I make sure the door's bolted . . . Well, of *course* I try to be understanding. I'm trying to tell you that. But I have to worry about Caroline too you know . . . Well, listen for a minute and I'll tell you what happened yesterday. We're sitting at breakfast, you see, and Larry starts telling Caroline — a four year old girl, remember — about how he's off in the woods somewhere, God only knows *where*, and he meets this female dog and, well, I can't go on . . . No, I simply can't. It's too embarrassing . . . No, Evelyn. You've missed the whole point. It's mating season, get it? And Larry goes into explicit detail . . . Well, maybe. But that's not even the worst part . . . Hold on for just a second and I'll get to it. They, well, I don't know how to phrase this delicately. They get *stuck* . . . *No*, Evelyn. Honestly, sometimes I don't even think you're listening to me. They get stuck *together*. Can you believe that? What am I supposed to say? Caroline's not going to outgrow this sort of trauma, I can promise you that." Sherryl heard the kitchen door swing open behind her. "Hold on, Evelyn," she said, and turned.

Caroline blocked the door open with her foot. "What are you talking about?" Her hand gripped a plastic Pez dispenser. Wylie Coyote's head was propped back by her thumb, and a small pink lozenge extruded from his throat.

"It's Evelyn, dear. We're just talking."

Caroline lips were flushed and purple; purple stains speckled her white dress. She thought for a moment, took the candy with her teeth and chewed. Finally she said, "I think maybe somebody may have spilled grape juice on one of Daddy's wolf books."

Larry read Guy Endore's *The Werewolf of Paris*, Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Rowland's *Animals With Human Faces*, Summers' *The Werewolf*, Pollard's *Wolves and Werewolves*, Lane's *The Wild Boy of Averyon*, Malson's *Wolf Children and the Problem of Human Nature*. Marty gave him the card of a Jungian in Topanga Canyon who sat Larry in a plush chair, said "archetype" a few times, informed him that *everyone* is fascinated with evil, sadism, pain ("It's perfectly normal, perfectly *human*."), recommended Robert Eisler's *Man Into Wolf*, charged seventy-five dollars and offered him a valium prescription with refill. "But when I'm a wolf, I never know evil," Larry said as he was ushered out the door by a blonde receptionist. "When I'm a wolf, I only know peace."

"I don't know, Larry. It just gives me the creeps," Sherryl said that night after Caroline was in bed. "It's *weird*, that's what it is. Bullying defenceless little mice and deer that never hurt anybody. Talking about killing, and blood, and ice — at *breakfast*."

Larry stayed awake until two a.m. and watched *The Wolf-Man* on Channel Five. Claude Rains said, "There's good and evil in every man's soul. In this case, the evil takes the shape of a wolf." No, Larry thought, and read Freud's *The Case of the Wolf-Man*, the first chapter of Mack's *Nightmares and Human Conflict*. No. Then he went to bed and dreamed of the wolves.

"The wolf-spirit has always been considered very *wakan*," Hungry Bear said, his feet propped on his desk. He poked out his cigarette against the rim of the metal wastebasket, then prepared to light another. "Most tribes believe the wolf's howl portends bad things. The Lakota say, 'The man who dreams of the wolf is not very much on his guard, but the man haughtily closes his eyes, for he is very much on his guard.' I don't know what that means, exactly, but I read it somewhere." Hungry Bear refilled his dixie-cup with Vin Rose. His grimy teeshirt was taut against his large stomach; a band of pale skin bordered his belt. He wore a plaid Irish derby atop his braided hair. "I try to do a good deal of reading," he said, and fumbled in his diminished pack of *Salems*.

"So do I," Larry said. "Maybe you could recommend —"

"I don't think the wolf was ever recognized as any sort of deity, but I might be wrong." Hungry Bear watched the smoke unravel from his cigarette. "But still, you shouldn't be too worried. It's very common for animal spritis to possess a man. They use his body when he's asleep. When he awakes, he can't remember anything . . . oh, wait. That's not quite right, is it? You said you remember your dreams? Well . . . again, I could be wrong. I guess you *could* remember. Sure, I don't see why not," he said, and poured more Vin Rose.

"*I* inhabit the body of the *wolf*," Larry said, beginning to lose interest, and glanced around the cluttered office. The venetian blinds were dusty and cracked, the floors littered with tattered men's magazines, empty Vin Rose bottles and crumpled cigarette packs. He said, "I don't know what I should call you. *Mister* Bear?"

"No, of course not." Hungry Bear waved away the notion, dispersing smoke. "Call me Jim. That's my real name. Jim Prideux. I took Hungry Bear for business purposes. If you remember, Hungry Bear was the brand name of a terrific canned chili. It was discontinued after the war, though, I'm afraid." He checked his shirt pocket. "Do you see a pack of cigarettes over there? Seems I'm running short."

"You're not Indian?" Larry asked.

"Sure. Of course I'm Indian. One-eighth pure Sho-

shone. My great grandmother was a Shoshone princess. Well, maybe not a princess, exactly. But *her* father was an authentic medicine man. I've inherited the gift." Jim Prideux rummaged through the papers on his desk. "Are you sure you don't see them? I just bought a pack an hour ago."

"This is very nice," Sherryl said, and swallowed her last bit of red snapper. She touched her lips delicately with the napkin. "It's *so* nice to get out of the house for a change. You wouldn't know how much."

"Sure I would, darling," Andrew Prytowsky said, and poured more *Calvados*.

"No, you wouldn't, Andy. Your wife, Danielle, is *normal*. You wouldn't know what it's like living with someone as . . . well, as *unstable* as Larry's been lately."

"I'm sure it's been very difficult for you."

"Marty Cabrillo, Larry's boss at work, got Larry in touch with a doctor, a *good* doctor. Larry visits him *once* and then tells me he isn't going anymore. I say to Larry, don't you think he can help you? And Larry says no, he can't, he can't help him at all. He says the doctor is *stupid*. Can you believe that? I say to Larry, this man has a *Ph.D.* I don't think you can just call him *stupid*. And Larry says *I* don't know what *I'm* talking about, either. Larry thinks he knows more than a man with a Ph.D. That's what Larry told me."

"Here. Why don't you finish it." Andrew put down the empty bottle and flagged the waiter with his upraised Master-Card.

"I'm sorry, Andy." Sherryl dabbed her eyes with the napkin. "It's just I'm so shook up lately. All I ever asked for was a normal life. That's not too much to ask, is it? A nice home, a normal husband. Someone who could give me a little help and support. Is that so much? Is it?"

"Of course not." Andrew signed the check. After the waiter left he said, "I'm glad we could do this."

Sherryl folded her napkin and replaced it on the table. "I'm glad you called. This was very nice."

"We'll do it again."

"We should." Sherryl watched the approaching dessert cart. "Gee. It all looks so good," she said, and selected cheese cake.

Two weeks later Larry returned home from work and found the letter on the kitchen table.

Dear Larry,

I know you're going to take this the wrong way and I only hope you realize Caroline and I still care about you but I've thought about this a lot and even sought professional counselling on one occasion and I think it's the only solution right now at this moment in our lives. Especially Caroline who is at a very tender age. Please don't try calling because I told my mother not to tell you where we are for a while. Please realize I don't want to hurt you and this will probably be better for both of us in the long run, and I hope you make it through your difficulties and I'll think good thoughts for you often.

Sherryl

Illustrated by Ian Miller

"You can't just keep moping around, Larry. Things'll get better, just you wait. I sense big improvements coming in your life. But first you've got to start being more careful around the office." Marty sat on the edge of Larry's desk. He pulled a string of magnetized paper clips in and out of a clear plastic dispenser. "Did I tell you Henderson asked about you yesterday? Asked about you *by name*. Now, I'm not trying to make you paranoid or anything, but if Henderson asked about you then you can bet your socks the *rest* of the guys in Management have been tossing your name around. And Henderson's not a bad guy, Larry. I'm not suggesting that. But there's been a sincere . . . a sincere *concern* about your performance around here lately. And don't think I don't understand. Really, Larry, I'm very sensitive to your position. Beatrice and I came close to breaking up a couple of times ourselves — and I don't know *what* I'd

do without Betty and the kids. But you've got to keep your chin up, buddy. Plow straight ahead. And remember, I'm on *your* side."

At his desk, Larry made careful, persistent marks on a sheet of graph paper. The frequency of dreams had increased over the past few weeks; the line on the graph swooped upwards. Often three, even four times a night he started awake in bed, clicked on the reading lamp and reached for a pen and notepad from the end table, quickly jotting down terrain and sub-species characteristics while the aromas of forest, desert and tundra were displaced by the close stale odours of grimy bedsheets, leftover Swanson frozen dinner entrees, and the Johnson's Chlorophyll-Scented Home Deodorizer.

"I'm really sincere about this, Larry. I can't keep covering for you. I want some assurances from you, I want to start seeing some *effort* on your part. You're going to begin seeing Dave Boudreau on the third floor. He's the employee stress-counsellor — and he's not a shrink or anything, Larry. I know how you feel about *them*. He's just a regular guy like you and me who happens to have a lot of experience with these sorts of problems. You and Sherryl, I mean. All right, Larry? Does that sound fair to you?"

"Sure, Marty," Larry said, "I appreciate your help, I really do," and peeled another sheet from the Thrifty pad. Abcissa, he thought: real time. Ordinate: dream time. At the top of the page he scribbled *Pleistocene*.

"I'm dreaming now more than ever," Larry told Dave Boudreau the following Thursday. "Sometimes half a dozen times each night. Look, I've kept a record —" Larry opened a large red loose-leaf binder, flipped through a sheaf of papers, and unclamped a sheet of graph paper. "There, that's last Friday. Six times." He held the sheet of paper over the desk, pointing at it. "And Sunday — *seven* times. And that's not even the significant part. I haven't even got to *that* part yet."

Dave Boudreau sat behind his desk and rocked slightly in a swivel chair. He glanced politely at the statistical chart. Then his abstract gaze returned to Tahitian surf in a framed travel poster. He heard the binder clamp click again.

Larry pulled up his chair until the armrests knocked the edge of the desk. "Increasingly I dream of the Pleistocene, the Ice Age. The Great Hunt, when man and wolf hunted together, bound by one pack, responsible to one community, seeking their common prey across the cold ice, beneath the cold sun. Is *that* something? Is that one hell of an archetype or what?"

Casually Boudreau opened the manila folder on his desk.

CHAMBERS, LAWRENCE
SUPPLIES AND SERVICES DEPARTMENT
BORN: 3-6-45 EYES: BLUE

"And don't get me wrong. I'm just kidding about that archetype stuff. That's not even close, that's not even in the same ballpark. These aren't memories, for chrissakes. When I dream of the wolf, I *am* the wolf. I've been wolves in New York, Montana, and Beirut. It's as if time and space, dream and reality, have just *opened up*, joined me with everything, everything *real*. I'm living the *one life*, understand? The life of the hunter and the prey, the dream and the world, the blood and the spirit. It's really spectacular, isn't it? Have you ever heard of anything like it."

In the space reserved for Counsellor's Comments Boudreau scribbled "wolf nut", and underlined it three times.

When Larry arrived at work the following Monday the security guard took his I.D. card and, after consulting his log, asked him to please wait a minute. The guard picked up his phone and asked the operator for Management. "This is station six. Mr Lawrence Chambers has just arrived." The guard listened quietly to the voice at the other end. He snapped his pencil against the desk in four-four time.

Finally he put down the phone and said, "I'm sorry. I'll have to keep your card. Would you please follow me?"

They walked down the hall to Payroll. Larry was given his final paycheck and, in a separate envelope, another check for employee minimum compensation.

By the time Larry returned home it was still only ten a.m. He cleared the old newspapers from the stoop, unbound and opened the whitest, most recent one. He read for a few minutes, then refolded the paper and placed it with the others beside the fireplace. He picked up Harrington and Paquet's *Wolves of the World* and put it down again. He got up and walked into the kitchen. Dishes piled in the sink, four full bags of trash. The few remaining dishes in the dishwasher were swirled with white mineral deposits. In the refrigerator he found a garlic bulb with long green shoots, an empty bottle of Worcestershire Sauce, and an egg. He drank stale apple juice from the plastic green pitcher, then continued making his rounds. In the bathroom: toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, water glass, eyedrops, mercurochrome, a stray bandage, Sherryl's Ph-balanced Spring Mountain Shampoo, his electric razor. All the clothes and toys were gone from Caroline's room. Over the bed the poster of a wolf gazed down at him, its eyes sharp, canny, primitively alert.

He tried to watch television. People won sailboats and trash compactors on game shows, cheated each other and plotted financial coups on soap operas. After a while he got up again and returned to the bathroom, opened the medicine cabinet. Johnson's Baby Aspirin, an old stiffened toothbrush, mouthwash, a bobby pin. High on the top shelf he found Sherryl's Seconal in a child-proof bottle. He took two. Then he got into bed.

Sometime after dawn he dreamed again of the wolves. The dream was brief, detached. He viewed the wolves from far away. From atop a high bluff, perhaps, hidden behind some bushes, like Jane Goodall. The wolves moved down into the gully and paused before a small stream, drinking. Two cubs splashed and chased one another through the puddles. The other wolves observed them dispassionately. The sun was going down. Larry woke up. It was just past six a.m.

He stayed indoors during the day. In the evening he might walk to the corner Liquor Mart to cash a check and purchase milk, scotch, and Stouffer's frozen dinners. Sometimes, remembering Sherryl and Caroline, he turned the television up louder. It wasn't their physical presence he missed (he could hardly recall their faces anymore) but rather their noise: the clatter of dishes, the inconstant whir and jingle of mechanical

toys. Soundless, the air seemed thinner, staler, somewhat oppressive, as if he were sealed inside an airtight crystal vault. The silence invested everything — the walls, the furniture, the diminishing vial of Seconal, the large empty spaces of the bedrooms, even the mindless chatter of the Flintstones on television. He drank his beer beside the front window and watched the dust swirl soundlessly in the soundless shafts of light, recalling the wolves and the soundless expanse of white ice where not only the noise but even the aromas and textures of the landscape seemed to be leaking out of the dream like atmosphere from the cracks in some domed, underwater city. In the mornings, now, he hardly remembered the dreams anymore. Sporadic glimpses of the wolf, the prey, the sky, the moon, interspliced meaninglessly, like some surrealist montage. He smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, just to give his hands something to do. The scotch and Seconal compelled him to take so many naps during the day that he couldn't sleep at night. Wolves, he thought. Wolves in Utah, Baffin Island, Tibet, even Hollywood. Wolves secretly everywhere . . . Eventually the dreams disappeared entirely. Sleep became a dark visionless place where nothing ever happened.

The Seconal, he thought one morning, and departed for the library. He squinted at the sunlight, staggered occasionally. People looked at him. A book entitled *Sleep* by Gay Gaer Luce and Julius Siegal confirmed his suspicions. Alcohol and barbiturates suppressed the dream stage of sleep. He returned home and poured the scotch down the sink, the remaining Seconal down the toilet. He lay in bed throughout the afternoon, the night and following morning. He tossed and turned. He couldn't keep his eyes closed more than a minute. His heart palpitated disconcertingly. He tried to remember the wolf's image, and saw only pictures in books. He tried to recall the prey's hot steaming blood, and tasted only yesterday's Chicken McNuggets. He wanted the map of the sky, and found only the close humid rectangle of the bedroom. He got up and walked into the living room. It was night again. In order to dream, he must sleep. In order to regain the real, he must dispel the illusion: the newspaper, the matched furniture, the unswept carpet, the television, the pink slip, Sherryl's letter, Caroline's toys, the bus, easy liquidity, the books. He realized then that the evil was not the wolf, but rather the disavowal of the wolf. The violence was not in nature, but rather in the systematic repression of that nature. Madness was not the dream, but rather the world deprived of the dream, he thought, selected a stale pretzel from the bowl, chewed, and gazed out the window at the dim, empty streets below where occasional streetlamps illuminated silent, unoccupied cars parked along the curbs. The moon made a faint impression against the high screen of fog. A distant siren wailed, a dog barked, and in their homes the population slept fitfully, often aided by Seconal and Dilantin, descending through soft penetrable stages of sleep, seeking that fugitive half-world in which they struggled to dream beneath the repressive shadows of the real.

A few weeks after signing Larry Chambers' termination notice, Marty Cabrillo took his wife to Shasta. "Two weeks alone," he promised her. "We'll leave the kids with your mother. Just the two of us, the trees, candlelight dinners again, just like I always said it would be." But Marty said nothing during the long drive. Beatrice put her arm around him and he shrugged against her. "Please," he said. "I can't get comfortable." At the cabin they sat out on the sundeck. Marty held paperbacks and turned the pages, Beatrice read *People Magazine*. After only a few days they returned home. "I'm sorry, honey," Marty said. "I'll make it up to you. I promise."

"What's the matter with you lately?"

"Nothing. Just things on my mind."

"Work?"

"Sort of."

After a while Beatrice said "Larry," folded her arms, and gazed out the window at Ventura car lots.

The following Sunday Marty drove to *Ralph's* in Fairfax, loaded four bags of groceries into his Toyota station wagon, and drove to Larry's house on Clifton Avenue. The front yard was brown and overgrown; the aluminium garbage cans, streaked with orange rust, lay overturned in the alley. Dormant snails studded the front of the house, their slick intricate trails glistening in the sunlight. Marty knocked, rang the bell a few times. The door was ajar and he pushed it open. A pyramid of bundled newspapers blocked the door, permitting him to just push through. In the living room, torn magazines and mouldy dishes lay strewn across the sofa, chairs and floor. The telephone receiver was off the hook, wailing faintly like a distant, premonitory siren. At first the room seemed oddly disproportionate, as if the furniture had been rearranged. Then he noticed Larry asleep on the middle of the floor, his head propped by a sofa cushion, his arm wrapped around a leg of the coffee table. "He must've lost eighty, ninety pounds," Marty told Beatrice later that night. "His clothes stank, he hadn't shaved or washed in I don't know how long. And all I could think looking at him was it's *my* fault. *I* was responsible. Me, Marty Cabrillo."

Marty followed the ambulance to St John's, wishing they would run the siren. "Dehydration," the doctor told him, after Marty paid the deposit on a private room. Larry lay in a stiff, geometric white bed, a glucose bottle hanging beside him, a white tube connected to his arm by white adhesive tape. Every so often the glucose bubbled. "We'll bring him along slow, have him eating solid food in a couple days. I think he'll be all right," the doctor said, and handed him another form to sign.

"It's all my fault," Marty said when Larry regained consciousness the next morning. "Look. I brought you some books to read. And the flowers — they're from Sherryl. Beatrice got in touch with her last night and she's on her way here right now. The worst is over, pal. The worst is all behind you."

Later Sherryl told him, "We missed you. Caroline missed you. *I* missed you. Oh, Larry. You just look so *awful*." Sherryl laid her head in Larry's lap and cried, hugging him. Silently Larry stroked her long blonde hair. Sherryl had been staying with her sister in Burbank, working as a secretary at one of the studios. Her boss was a flushed, obese little man who put his hand

on her knee while she took dictation, or snuck up behind her every once in a while and gave her a sharp pinch. "Loosen up, relax; life's short," he told her. Caroline hated her new nursery school and cried every day. Sherryl's sister had started bringing the Classified pages home, pointing out to her the best bets on her own apartment. Andy had promised to help out, but every time she called his office his secretary said he was still out of town. And then one of the Volvo's tires went flat, and in all the rush of moving she found she had misplaced her triple-A card, and so she just started crying, right there on the side of the freeway, because it seemed as if nothing, nothing ever went right for her anymore.

"We need you, Larry," Sherryl said. "You need us. I'm sorry what happened, but I always loved you. It wasn't because I didn't love you. And Marty thinks he can get your old job back —"

Marty leaned forward, whispered something to her.

"He says he's certain. He's certain he can get it back. Did you hear, honey? Everything's going to be all right. We're going to be happy again, just like before."

Sherryl brought Caroline home a month later.

"Is Daddy home?" Caroline asked.

"He's at work now, honey. But he'll be back soon. He's missed you."

Caroline waited to be unbuckled, climbed out of the car. The front yard was green and delicate, the house repainted yellow. The place seemed only dimly familiar, like the photograph Mommy showed her of where she lived when she was born.

"All your toys are in your room, sweetheart. Be good and play for a while. Mommy'll fix dinner."

Caroline's room had been repainted, too. Over her bed hung a bright new Yosemite Sam poster. She opened the oak toy chest. The toys were boxed and neatly arranged, just like on the shelves at the store. She went into the bedroom and looked at Daddy's bookcase. The large picture books were gone, along with their photographs of wolves and deer and rabbits and forests and men with rifles and hairy, misshapen primitive men. Bent paperbacks had replaced them. The covers depicted beautiful men and women, Nazi insignias, secret dossiers, demonic children, cowboys on horses, murder weapons.

She heard the front door open. "Hi, honey. Sorry I'm late. I ran into Andy Prytowsky on the bus — remember him? I introduced you at a party last year. Anyway, I told him I'd drop by his office tomorrow. I figure it's time we started some sort of college fund for Caroline. I'm pretty excited about it. Andy says he can work us a nice little tax break, too. Oh, and look what else. I bought us some wine. For later."

Caroline walked halfway down the hall. Mommy and Daddy stood at the door, kissing.

"There she is. There's my little girl."

Daddy picked her up high in the air. His face seemed strange and unfamiliar, like the front of the house.

"So how have you been, sweetheart?" Daddy put her down.

"I'll finish dinner," Sherryl said.

"Come and sit down." Daddy led her to the sofa. "Tell me what you've been up to. Did you have fun at Aunt Judy's?"

Caroline picked at a scab on her knee. "I guess."

"What do you want to do? I thought we'd go to a movie later. Would you like that?"

Caroline clasped her hands. here is the church, and here is the steeple. When you open the doors you see all the people.

"What should we do right now? Do you want to play a game? Do you want me to read you one of your Dr Seuss books?"

Caroline thought for a while. Daddy's large rough hand ran through her hair, snagging it. Delicately, she pushed his hand away.

"I want to watch television," she said after a while.

Three nights a week Larry went to the YMCA with Marty. Sherryl began subscribing to *Sunset Magazine*, and over dinner they discussed a new home, or at least improvements on their present one. Finally Marty suggested they buy into his Shasta property. "Betty and I don't make it up there more than three or four times a year. The rest of the time it'd be all yours." Larry took out a second mortgage, paid Marty a lump sum, and began sharing the monthly payments. The first few months they drove up nearly every weekend. Then Larry received a promotion which required him to make weekly trips to the Bakersfield office. "I'm really bushed from all this driving," he told Sherryl. "We'll try and make Shasta *next* week." Caroline started grade school in the fall. Sherryl joined an ERA support group and was gone two nights a week. Occasionally Larry spent the night in Bakersfield, and drove from there to work the next morning.

"All I told Conklin was I've got a merchandise deficit from his store three months in a row. It wasn't like I called him a thief or anything. I just wanted an explanation. I'm entitled to that much, don't you think? It's my job, right?"

"I'm sure he didn't mean it, Larry. He was probably just upset." Sherryl sat on the sofa, smoking a cigarette.

"I'm sure he *was* upset. I'm sure he *was*." Larry sat at the dining room table. The table was covered with inventories, company billing statements, and large gray Acco-Grip binders. His briefcase sat open on the chair beside him. "And now *I'm* a little upset, all right? Is that all right with you?"

"I'm sure you are, Larry. I was just saying maybe he didn't mean it, that's all. That's all I said."

Larry put down his pencil. "No. I don't think that's all you said."

Sherryl looked at the *T.V. Guide* on the coffee table, considered picking it up. Then she thought she heard Caroline's bedroom door squeak open down the hall.

"What you said was I'm imagining things. Isn't *that* what you said?"

Sherryl crushed out her cigarette. "Larry, I really wish you'd stop snapping at *me* every time you're mad at somebody." She got up and went to the end of the hall. "Caroline. Aren't you supposed to be in bed?"

Caroline's door squeaked shut. Sherryl watched the parallelogram of light on the hall floor diminish to a fine yellow line. "And turn off those lights, young lady. You heard me. Right now," Sherryl said. In high school Billy Mason had a crush on me, she thought, but I didn't give him the time of day. That morning she had seen Billy's picture on the cover of *Software World*

at the supermarket.

"What I mean is, Larry, is that you're not the *only* one who has a bad day sometimes —"

Sherryl was turning to face him when the telephone rang.

"Sometimes *my* day hasn't been that hot either," she said, and retreated to the telephone, picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi. Hello," the voice said. "I was hoping, well, I mean I didn't want to disturb anybody, but I wondered if Mr Chambers was in. Mr *Larry* Chambers, I think? Have I got that right?"

"This is his wife. Who's this?"

"Who is it?" Larry asked, picking up his pencil, jotting a number on his note pad.

Sherryl gazed expressionlessly over Larry's head at the dining room window and, beyond, the 7-11 marquee. The voice on the phone filled her ears like radio static. "— I mean, I just had the article here a moment ago, let me see . . . Look, tell him Hungry Bear called, and by the time he calls back I'll find the article, I promise — wait, in fact here it is right here — no, sorry, *that's* not it. But still, tell him Jim called. Jim Prideux —" Sherryl looked around the kitchen. She had forgotten to clean up after dinner. The sink was filled with dirty dishes, the counter top littered with bread crumbs. Stray Cheerio's from the morning breakfast had attached themselves like barnacles to the formica table. She pulled up a chair and sat down, feeling suddenly tired. There was a television movie she had been looking forward to all week, and now, by the time she finished her cleaning, the show would practically be over. She felt like saying to hell with all of it; she just wanted to go to bed. To hell with Larry, Caroline, the dishes, the vacuuming — every damn bit of it. The voice buzzed inconstantly in her ear like a mosquito, something about wolves, Navajo deities, he wasn't exactly sure . . . Sherryl said, "Listen, Mr Bear, or Mr Prideux or Mr Whoever You Are. Listen to me for just one minute, and I'll say this as *nicely* as I can. Please don't call here anymore. Larry's not interested, *I'm* not interested. Frankly, Mr Bear, I don't think *any*body's interested. I don't think anybody's interested at all."

In Sherryl's dream the men and wolves loped together across the white plain. Larry was there, and Caroline, and Andy and Evelyn and Marty and Beatrice. Sherryl recognised the mailman, the newspaper boy, supermarket employees, former boy friends and lovers. Even her parents were there, keeping pace with wolves under the cold moonlight. Everybody was dressed as usual: the men wore slacks, ties, cufflinks and starched shirts, the women skirts, blouses, jewellery and high heels. Caroline carried one of her toys, Andy his briefcase, Marty his racquetball racket, and Larry one of his largest gray Acco-Grip binders. Sherryl carried a greasy spatula in her right hand, a tarnished coffee pot in her left. We forgot to schedule Caroline's dental appointment, she told Larry. When I was a child you treated me as if I was stupid, she told her father, but I wasn't stupid. The sky is filled with stars, she told Davey Stewart, her high school sweetheart. The Milky Way: the Wolf's Trail. But nobody responded, nobody even seemed to notice her. The bright air was laced with the spoor of

caribou. She felt a sudden elbow in her back, she turned

and awoke in a dark room, a stiff bed. I forgot the shopping today, she thought. There isn't any milk in the house, or any coffee.

Beside her in bed, the man slowly moved.

Sherryl sat up, her pupils gradually dilating. Eventually she discerned the motel room's clean uncluttered angles. The thin and fragile dressing table, the water glasses wrapped in wax paper, the hot plate, the aluminium hot cocoa packets.

"What's the matter, baby?" Andrew sat up beside her, his arm encircling her waist. "Nightmare? Tell me, sweetheart. You can tell lover." He kissed her neck, stroked her warm stomach.

"Please, Andy. Not now. Please." Sherryl climbed out of bed. Her clothes lay folded on a wooden chair.

"Sorry. Forget it." Andrew rolled over, adjusted his pillow, and listened to the rustle of Sherryl's clothing.

Sherryl stood at the window, gazing out through the blinds. Stars and moon were occluded by a high haze of lamplight. She heard the distant hishing of street-sweepers, and pulled on her blouse. Then she heard the rain begin, drumming hollowly against the cheap plywood door.

Andrew took his watch from the end table. The luminous dial said almost two a.m. "I'll call you," he said

"No," she said. "I'll call you this time. I need a few days to think." She opened the door and stepped out into the rain. They always do that, she thought. *They* have to be the ones who call, *they* have to be the ones who say when you'll meet, where you'll go. She pulled

her coat collar up over her new perm, gripped the iron bannister, and descended one step at a time on darkling high heels. Puddles were already gathering on the warped white cement stairs. "It's as if we don't have any brains of our own," Sherryl imagined herself telling Evelyn. "And I'm sure that's just what they think. That we haven't got the brains we were born with. That we have to be told *everything*." By the time she climbed into the Volvo the rain had abruptly ceased, as immediately as if a switch had been thrown. Her coat was soaked through, and she laid it out on the back seat to dry.

At this hour the streets were practically deserted. She drove past a succession of shops and restaurants: Bob's Big Boy, Li'l Pickle Sandwiches, Al's Exotic Birds, Ralph's Market. Inside Long's Drugs empty aisles of hair supplies, pet food, household appliances and vitamin supplements were illuminated by pale, watery fluorescents, like the inside of an aquarium. "It's not as if we couldn't do just as well without them," she would continue, awaiting Evelyn's quick nods of agreement. "I certainly didn't need to get married. I could have done just as well on my own. It's not as if it's some man's secret how to get by in this world. It's perfectly easy to succeed, you know. It's just a matter of keeping your feet on the ground, being objective about things, not fooling yourself. That's all there is to it. That's the big secret."

As she turned onto Beverly Glen her high-beams, sweeping through an alleyway, reflected off a pair of attentive red eyes. Being realistic, she thought, and heard the wolves emerge from alleyways, abandoned buildings, underground parking garages, their black calloused paws pattering like rain against the damp streets. They loped alongside her car for short distances, trailed off to gobble stray snails and mice, paused to bite and scratch their fleas. She refused to look, driving on through the deserted city. The alternating traffic lights cast shifting patterns and colours across the glimmering asphalt, like rotating spotlights on aluminium Christmas trees. Wolves, men, lovers, cars, streets, cities, worlds, stars. The real and the unreal, the true and the untrue. Unless you're careful it all starts looking like a dream, it all seems pretty strange and impossible, she thought, while all across the city the wolves began to howl.

Scott Bradfield's last story in these pages was "Unmistakably the Finest" (*IZ* 8), and it was praised by Peter Nicholls in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 6th July 1984. His first story for us, "The *Flash!* Kid" (*IZ* 5), has already been selected twice for anthologization. Scott is 29 years old, and lives in southern California.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

A collaboration between two of the best young American writers, Bruce Sterling and John Shirley. Plus explorations of nuclear themes by Christopher Burns, David Langford and Lee Montgomerie. Artwork by Jim Burns, and much more . . .

SUBMIT YOUR STORIES TO INTERZONE

We welcome submissions from unknown and little-known writers. All manuscripts will be read sympathetically, but it would be helpful if you bear in mind the following points:

1. Read the magazine before you submit anything to us. Judge the standard of the material we are already publishing, and see if you can do as well—or better.

2. All stories should be typed, on one side of the paper only, preferably on white A4 paper, and *must* be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope of good size.

3. Please type your name and address, *and the word-length of the story*, on the top sheet of the manuscript.

4. The preferred length is 2,000 to 8,000 words. We rarely publish longer stories, and the few that we do accept have to be outstandingly good to justify their length.

5. Please submit stories *one at a time*. We've been surprised at the number of people who send us batches of three or four. Simply select your best story and let us see it.

6. Remember that *Interzone* is edited and published by an unpaid collective. We are doing what we are doing for the love of it. We pay for the fiction we publish, but all payments have to come from the proceeds of the magazine. We hope therefore that all aspiring writers will do what they can to support *Interzone*—by taking out a subscription and by persuading friends to subscribe. If we fail to sell enough copies there is little hope of us buying any of your stories in the future!

THE OUTER ZONE

SF CONVENTIONS AND THE READING PUBLIC

The regulars at science fiction conventions have been complaining for much of the past decade that the events have become too big, too diffuse, and too full of what are known as "media fans." Spring Bank Holiday 1984 saw what might be the logical conclusion — Tynecon II, the Mexicon, a single-interest convention devoted to "sf (in the widest sense) as a literary form."

Either you know what sf conventions are like or you don't; either you like them or you don't. The best way I've ever found to describe one to the uninitiated is "a four-day party, with guest authors, talks and discussions on sf and fanzines, and sf films." The problem lately has been that as the media fans have arrived, it has seemed necessary to cater for them. Five years ago, the Eastercon (the major British convention, held at Easter), had two programme streams: the main, serious-sf and films, programme, and the fan programme (talk about fanzines, quizzes and games). Since then, Eastercons have grown alternative programmes, video rooms, games areas, computer rooms . . . and they've practically doubled in size.

This all costs money, and it also damages the atmosphere of the convention itself. Ideally, there should be a sense of participation; too many media fans seem to come along purely as consumers. There are legends of people who spend their whole time at a convention in the video or computer room; what, ask the old-timers, are they contributing to a *science-fiction* convention? Not all media fans are culpable; since the late 70s certain Star-Trek devotees have been protesting that they go to sf conventions because they like them as they are (or were). They have their own, single-interest, conventions at which to swop pictures of Spock or whatever it is they do.

It may have been this which inspired a group of people in London and Newcastle to start a new type of single-interest convention: one focusing on written sf. Tynecon II, the Mexicon (held in Newcastle), had a single programme (and a very long, event-packed one too) and a splendid atmosphere. Alasdair Gray, Russell Hoban, and Richard Cowper had solo spots on the programme; other authors, editors and critics spoke on panel discussions. The Mexicon also had probably the best "outside" publicity any small convention has had in ten years; local radio and TV spots, features in local arts newsletters, even an advertisement in *Interzone*.

The committee confidently expected that this would bring a good hundred or so "walk-ins" — on-the-door registrations from those who don't normally come to conventions. The last sf convention in Newcastle (Tynecon I in 1974) attracted 150 walk-ins, with much less publicity. Tynecon II got 38, some regular convention-goers who had left the decision to the last minute.

Kevin Williams, Chairman of the committee and a marketing man in professional life, is convinced that the reason is that "all our advertising pushed the fact that the convention was oriented to written sf." He wouldn't have it any other way, of course; that was what he and his committee set out to provide, and it was a great success for its 300 or so members. Nevertheless, Williams regretfully sees it as confirmation that, since 1974, the serious audience for written sf has in fact declined; to some extent the effect has been masked by a growth of the "media" audience. He suspects it was "the conscious embracing of an catering for fringe interests that caused the explosive growth of Eastercons." A look round London's Forbidden Planet bookshop on a Saturday morning tells the same tale; most customers seem to be there for the comics and computer books. Where does this leave *Interzone* and its readers?

The good news, for those interested in a wide range of written sf, is that there is to be a second Mexicon early in 1986. It will be held in the South of England, and registration is at present £6.00. A stamped addressed envelope to 24a, Beech Road, London N11 2DA will produce further details.

Jenny Butler

NEWS

IZ ANTHOLOGY: NEW RYMAN STORY

Interzone: The First Anthology will be published by J.M. Dent in April 1985. The longest story, "O Happy Day" by Geoff Ryman, is brand-new. Ryman's novella, "The Unconquered Country", has received enormous praise since its appearance in *Interzone* 7, and we are delighted to be able to offer a previously unpublished story of his in the book. The other 12 stories are selected from our first nine issues; Angela Carter, Keith Roberts, J.G. Ballard, Scott Bradfield and Cherry Wilder are among the authors. Dent's team are producing an attractive, high-quality paperback for us — with a fascinating cover by Robert Mason — and we have enjoyed working with them. Their enthusiasm for the project reflects their growing support for innovative fiction. However, they are probably still best known for Everyman's Library; does anyone remember Edmund Gosse's apocalyptic claim about the series, made in 1928 and used for many years on its jackets? "A cosmic convulsion might utterly destroy all the other printed works in the world, and still if a complete set of Everyman's Library floated on the waters enough would be preserved to carry on the unbroken tradition of literature."

Is *that* why Dent decided to reprint *The Drowned World*?

CABINET RESHUFFLE

Interzone has been edited and published from the first by a team of volunteers. Now three of the founder-editors — John Clute, Alan Dorey and Roz Kaveney — take up roles as Advisory Editors, leaving the other three — Colin Greenland, Simon Ounsley and David Pringle — as Co-Editors in charge of the day-to-day running of the magazine. In addition, we are taking on two new Assistant Editors — Judith Hanna and Lin Morris —

to help us assess the story manuscripts which are sent to *Interzone* by growing numbers of hopeful new writers. Abigail Frost, who has been the magazine's Designer and paste-up artist for the past five issues, is now taking on the additional job of News Editor (if you have any news which may be of interest to *Interzone*'s readers please send it to her at 69 Robin Hood Gardens, Cotton Street, London E14 — but bear in mind our slow quarterly schedule). Here are some brief biographical notes on Judith, Lin and Abigail:

Judith Hanna is an Australian. Dropped postgraduate studies at Sydney University to write fiction. Sold a couple of stories. Moved to Britain to check whether this country is a fiction or for real; after two years, still not sure. Regular reviewer for the British Science Fiction Association. Works for CND. Hobbies: sesquipedalianism, knitting, laziness.

Lin Morris teaches Latin, and studies English at University College, London. She has helped produce undergraduate magazines and radical scandal-sheets. When she grows up she wants to be Turandot.

Abigail Frost studied English at Oxford and print production at the London College of Printing. After working in publishing for 10 years, she left to become a polymorphous freelance. She writes about applied arts for *Crafts* magazine and *Arts Review*. Her hobby is telephoning *Interzone* editors.

David Pringle

ARTHUR C CLARKE GIFT

We are pleased to announce that *Interzone* has received a generous donation from the world's most famous science-fiction writer, Arthur C. Clarke. He becomes the magazine's seventh lifetime subscriber (the others include Francisco Porrua of Spain, Kazuyoshi Shiraishi of Japan, and John Shirley of New York). Any other readers who wish to become lifetime subscribers may do so by sending the magazine a donation of £50 or more.

AUSTRALIANS PLEASE NOTE

Along with an Australian member of the editorial team, *Interzone* has gained an Australian agent. His name is Justin Ackroyd, and his address appears on the editorial page.

ON THE EDGE

Mary Gentle

Somewhere between Gutenberg and now, it became necessary to have not just books, but different categories of books; and a sizable proportion of the population promptly gave up calculating the number of angels who could dance on the head of a pin, and with glad cries seized (latterly) on the difference between sf and fantasy, hard science and magic realism, etc and etc. The truth of the matter is, of course, that all books contain all these (and other) qualities: only the proportions differ. What's important is the use individual authors put them to, in individual books.

(No angels can dance on the head of a pin, by the way. Angels can't dance.)

Michael Bishop's **Who Made Stevie Crye?** (Arkham House, $15.95) is a brilliant book, but it isn't the book it says it is. Arkham House could issue it with a disclaimer: despite apparently gruesome jacket and occult-fic blurb, this is not just another horror novel. One scene at least may out-Herbert Herbert, but that isn't the shelf this book belongs on.

What is it? Gothic, certainly. It's subtitled "A Novel of the American South." My knowledge of that is less than extensive. I think, however, that Joyce Carol Oates, and possibly also Karen Blixen, stand as godparents to Stevie Crye.

And in the words of the old cliché, once I picked it up I could not put it down (which involved a reading session in the bath, but I suppose things could have been worse). "Well-written" is a phrase by which critics usually designate that "transparent" prose that doesn't obtrude between readers and story. This novel is well-written — but words and words alone are story, as the structuralists continue to tell us, and *Who Made Stevie Crye?* is entirely self-aware.

It *is* a horror story. Of a sort. It's also a mystery, of the "what the hell's going on here?" variety. Part of the joy of this book is in how it raises certain expectations, and then circumvents them; and it isn't easy to point out the virtues of the story while retaining the surprises. But I'll try.

Suppose that you were a writer, like Stevie Crye, and that your typewriter began to write of its own accord? To transcribe your dreams, your nightmares?

And then suppose that it began to scriptwrite your reality for you — and that you believed it?

You could be nuts, of course. But then, what do you do when, as Stevie does, you hold an unlikely conversation with an imaginary publisher, and he promises to send you a book — and that book is delivered through the post, physically real?

What do you do when you dream of initiating your teenage son sexually, and he appears to remember it as a real event?

(Ah, the decadent South!)

Already we're into parafiction. Stevie Crye, thinking of submitting an Angela Carter-ish fantasy story, considers *Asimov's* and *Omni* as markets — but can also pick up and read a copy of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*; for further details of which I refer you to P.K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*. But this isn't a book that gets knotted up in its own fictional entrails, it reaches an entirely satisfactory resolution.

Earlier, I said "you," and I said it for a reason. It seems to me that *Who Made Stevie Crye?* includes a moral question, and one not often encountered. That is: what justification do we have for the way we treat fictional characters? If in some sense they were real, now. . . . How would you like it? Stevie Crye thinks Stevie Crye is real, hates having a scripted life, works out a satisfying ending. Maybe you should have a word with *your* Author?

Who Made Stevie Crye? is, as an artifact, a beautiful production. I could single out the "photographic illustrations" of Jeffrey K. Potter, particularly apt because they give a photographic reality to scenes one hundred per cent unreal; a visual counterpart to the novel's paradoxical nature.

The tricks of typography that begin the text are not merely tricks. The visual epigraph concerns capuchins and typewriters (readers will take the allusion); the verbal epigraph, from A.H.H. Lipscombe — who? You'll see — speaks of the human propensity for having one's cake and eating it too. Which *Who Made Stevie Crye* triumphantly does. The title is one of many puns, and the emphasis can fall on the second word as well as the last, and both questions are valid.

"Michael Bishop" is, I think, the answer. But one can never be sure. . . .

From literature as self-aware story-spinning, then, to literature as warning (but not necessarily propaganda):

In **The Chromosome Game** (Mithras Publishing Ltd, £2.99), Christopher Hodder-Williams may have come up with the only conceivable scenario in which the human race survives nuclear war. But before this causes the governments of all freedom-loving and freedom-loathing nations (to which you may append the names of your choice) to leap into a pre-emptive strike, let me add that it's an entirely mixed blessing.

The novel takes it for granted that we — you, me, Reagan, the Politburo — are going to render the surface of this

world uninhabitable, in the near future. So who survives?

Sperm and ova, in a massive life-support system, the *Kasiga*: a submarine that can remain in the depths until, three hundred years later, some parts of the Earth are habitable again. (Only just — the damage to the biosphere continues to cascade through food-chains and species-evolution.) Conception takes place, infants are raised by robots and hologram-parents, and the meek duly proceed to inherit the Earth. . .

Want to bet? This is the human race we're talking about, who had to invent both Original Sin and psychology to account for our basic bloody-mindedness. If the new race is to be raised by a computer. . . . well, who programmed the computer? GIGO, you might say; which *The Chromosome Game* illustrates.

This isn't sf in the Wells tradition, and shouldn't be read as a straight-realistic narrative. This is sf as Jonathan Swift began it, an ironic mirror to the world (even if it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between Swiftian sarcasm and an apparent pulp prose style). A laconic narrative includes gods — gods who operate from a Hilton hotel on Star 47, converse by Quantum Radio, read the *Celestial Times*, and send UFOs on budget-bedevilled missions; a military-industrial complex who study the events on *Kasiga* with less than godlike detachment.

The progenitor of the latter part of the novel is, possibly, the theme of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. While his teenagers reverted to savagery, Hodder-Williams's repeat in microcosm the good and evil of their dead past. How much *is* carried by chromosomes? On the one hand, the psychic Eagle is "special" because his donor-parents were in love. But Scorda is evil by nurture: a programme-error in his infancy. And, whatever the cause, is it possible to escape the past? *Kasiga* still conceals secrets.

While the end is ambiguous, the basic premise of *The Chromosome Game* is not: that ours is a self-destructive civilisation, rapidly going to hell in a handcart. Or to put it another way:

The Senior Interrogod said, "Stop the video there."

". . . somebody way back in the Twentieth Century knows what we're doing. Probably calls it clairvoyance or ESP — something of that sort."

The Interrogod said to a colleague, "Ironically the leakback will only reach them a fraction of a second before their holocaust."

"But they'll know?"

"They'll know. Too late."

Leave the angels and the pin alone. Just try drawing a line between reality and fiction. . .

Head in the Clouds?

Identity resides in the face. Bank robbers wear stocking masks; arrested, they are shrouded in blankets to protect them from inquisitive photographers. An obscured face is menacing, or numinous. Isis is veiled, and even Moses was not permitted to see Jehovah's face. Ian Sanderson's dream-woman (p.22) recalls the images of male anxiety in Magritte and Max Ernst, whose *La Femme Cent Têtes* has been most precisely translated *The Hundred Headless Woman*.

The old pub name that inspired Ben Jonson and outraged American feminists when it found its way to an East Coast restaurant was *The Silent Woman*, illustrated by a sign showing a woman with no head. The name is insulting, the argument ran, and the image dehumanizes us.

Male or female, we never see our own face, only its reversal in the bathroom mirror; but we see a headless naked body every time we get into the bath. So why should a faceless person be so awful, or awesome? Advertising photographers crop their subjects at the neck to generalize them: this could be you (or the obscure object of your desire) in the Caribbean, sipping Bacardi. Today controversy surrounds David Bailey's Greenpeace poster in which a woman (head out of frame) trails a bleeding fur coat: "It takes forty dumb animals to make a fur coat, but it only takes one to wear one." Once again there is a lot of noise about the silent, headless woman.

Humanity dreams of a shadow self, the unacceptable face of the flesh. These headless ghosts walk the corridors of the imagination, with wolves and railway engines, and other soft machines. No censor can suppress or redress them. They are effaced already. One cannot politicize the unconscious.

Colin Greenland

REVIEWS

Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter (Chatto, £8.95)

Fevvers, hatched in Whitechapel from an abandoned egg, reared in a household of women part brothel, part female academy, becomes the *aerialiste* of the age, six foot two in sequins and peroxide, the toast of Victorian London and darling of the crowned heads of Europe, not to mention the Grand Duke of Petersburg, who nearly clips her wings.

There are those who say that Fevver's wings are *not real*. There are those who claim that "Fevvers is not a woman at all but a cunningly constructed automaton made up of whalebone, india-rubber and springs"; that Fevvers is an illusion, a fable, a heavyweight allegory of the New Woman (gertcha!) as Big Ben wheezes its reluctant way past midnight on 31st December, 1899. Odd incidents and rumours of sedition trail like moulted pin-feathers where she goes galumphing by, hand-in-hand with Lizzie, her dresser, guardian and accomplice.

Carter's millennial carnival is a lot like Moorcock's, rich as eel gravy, heady as champagne. Fevvers comes on like a second Mrs Cornelius, being educated by Lizzie, a bloody-minded Una Persson with a shrewd line in political analysis and a remarkable handbag. How could anyone imagine Fevvers is anything but flesh and blood? For all her flights of fancy she's a good Cockney gel, with a heart of gold and a pocketful of tin. Pity sharp Jack Walser, who coasts in from California to expose the Feathered Fraud in his column "Great Humbugs of the World." He comes to poke the vortex. This is unwise. He gets sucked in. Us too.

Colin Greenland

Neuromancer by William Gibson (Gollancz, £8.95)

It is impossible not to remember Alfred Bester, who 30 years ago seemed streetwise to the future, just as William Gibson does now. Both writers have their eyelids pasted open to the great forward and abysm of the new words which they world — or the other way round, if you think it's mimesis rather than sleight-of-hand.

Yanked from a Japanese slum, where he's been trying to repair his damaged nervous system and re-enter cyberspace as a cowboy and steal data from the great glowing subjective geometrics that represent corporate hotcores, Case soon finds himself way out of his depth in Turkey, in the Sprawl (a neatish term for the long-predicted Boston-Atlanta megalopolis) and in Lagrange habitats out (as with Gully Foyle) in corporation-dominated interplanetary space. And if Case is out of his depth, so, soon enough, is Gibson; or, rather, the book

soon escapes into genre hyperboles and schlock metaphysics, and he never bothers to try to claw it back.

Case has been hired to penetrate the adamantine ICE (intrusion countermeasures electronics) that encase the weird Lagrange-based Tessier-Ashpool corporation whose two AIs (artificial intelligences) turn out to be operating the whole show, for reasons of their own, which they moon about as the book closes in mooshy apotheosis. (Jupiter is not mentioned; neither of the AIs really lives in disembodied form within the psychedelic ecstacy of a gas-storm on Jupiter; but both of them, Wintermute and Neuromancer, sound as if they *should*.) Gibson has gotten run away with by a very silly genre plot, and it's rather a shame.

Mainly because the texture of the book is so superb. Dense with the haecceity and wind of the "future." Funny, sly, engulfing. To Bester add T.J. Bass and Ron Cobb and the New York subway system graffiti matrix and perhaps James Tiptree Jr, and it comes clear that *Neuromancer* was conceived in a dense nutrient soup. In the mind's eye explosions: soup flying everywhere: keep Gibson from dumb quest plots that read like tv pilots for tax-loss mini-series, and he'll write one or two of the best books of the coming decade.

John Clute

ALSO RECEIVED

Tik-Tok by John Sladek (Corgi, £1.95). Dedicated to "decent law-abiding robots everywhere," a zany tale which won the 1984 BSFA Award as best novel. From the same author comes **The Lunatics of Terra** — only Sladek could have conceived that title! — (Gollancz, £7.95), a collection of 18 bright, tricky stories, two of which first appeared in *Interzone*. Recommended.

Apertures: A Study of the Writings of Brian Aldiss by Brian Griffin and David Wingrove (Greenwood Press, £27.95). A very worthy effort by two latter-day Leavisites. They compare Aldiss to Nietzsche, Dickens, Carlyle, Chesterton, Priestley, Spenser, C.S. Lewis, Svevo, Wordsworth, Joyce, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Louis MacNeice, Eliot, Conrad, Mann, Lawrence, Hardy, Pasternak, Schoenberg, Hesse, Shelley and many, many others.

The Dune Encyclopedia compiled by Willis E. McNelly (Corgi, £5.95) — 526 double-columned pages of useless information about Frank Herbert's "sub-creation." Good stuff for all those who wish to live in an everlasting Middle Ages of the mind. **(DP)**

LETTERS

Dear Editors:
I was not at all surprised to read that two stories from *IZ* were to be anthologised by Karl Edward Wagner; *The Year's Best Horror Stories*, reprinting work from Britain's only professional publication in the science fiction field. This is precisely how I relate to *Interzone* — as a magazine of horror, rather than of any other variety of imaginative fiction. Now, I appreciate a good horror story. And the fiction you publish frequently gives me exactly what I look for in such a story: not only the challenge to the perceptions and the questioning of the stability/reality of the phenomenal world, but a special quality which I first encountered in the works of Lovecraft, when I was quite young. Namely, that many of the stories you print are larger than the words themselves; they continue to "grow" in the mind long after the page is turned, becoming more disturbing and more challenging in the process. Lovecraft remains a good example of this type of progression, in that the effect created by absorption of the concepts informing the stories is often out of all proportion to the merit of the stories themselves as literary efforts. The minutes and hours following the reading of the story are more frightening than the story itself.

I *know* what I will get if I purchase *IZ*. So far, none of the issues have done anything to cause me to alter this opinion. Your stories use various conventions and are set in various places; they make different points. But in terms of emotional and — if you will excuse the word — spiritual effect, they are very similar. The same goes for the artwork. Disturbing and challenging they are. Every single time. It is a good thing your schedule is quarterly; more frequent exposure to such terrors would have me in a permanent state of emotional shock. You may think that perhaps, I am one who should take my interests elsewhere; that sf/imaginative fiction is too much for me; and that I still suffer from an old fashioned desire for escapist space opera and so on. At the risk of sounding defensive, I do not believe that this is so and I do not believe that I am alone in my feeling. Witness: the poll of attenders at Mexicon (not the least intellectual of conventions) which placed *sense of wonder* at the top of the list of what was sought in reading sf. If your stories convey such a sense it is normally in the form of wondering terror at the pits of the human soul that your writers excavate. Fair enough; the pits are there, they need to be explored. But *every* time?

While I am at it I might as well give my views on the matter raised by Abigail Frost in *IZ7*. I agree with her. From what I have said already you will appreciate my general reasons for this. Specifically: Dr Blumlein's story horrified me as well and not in the way to which I referred above. I presume, from several elements in the story (the doctor's meditation/questioning and the way in which he thinks of his patient which is nothing short of psychotic; the list at the end) that the point was not that of "revenge" on Reagan but that *any* power structure, even a "libertarian" one as indicated by the presence of Biko and Cochise, has the potential to become a Nazi-type horrorshow. Nazi medical "experiments" are of course the closest parallel this type of procedure has in reality. But if that was the point, why such intricately detailed dwelling on the perpetration of the atrocity? Why did your advertisements refer to the tale as "Reagan on the operating table" as if the fact that it was Reagan *was* the main point (the "revenge" angle)? It would not be too surprising if the unwary did construe it in terms of the revenge of the oppressed on the oppressor primarily, as if this position could ever be morally defensible, since although the signs of the doctor's lunacy and of the society's ghastliness *are* there, they are *too* subtly indicated. In particular the names of the doctors convey a bitter irony, but in terms of the moral structure of the story they are a massive red herring.

Ros Calverley
London

Dear Editors:
Your editorial in No. 8 was the finest yet and I hope to see this splendid ideology bear tangible fruit. To my eye, far too many *Interzone* pieces are afflicted by crippling introspection and self-indulgent false exoticism. There's a hothouse atmosphere to *Interzone*; many stories have an orchidlike preciosity. I could do with more light and a bracing draft of oxygen. More clarity in prose, more intellectural rigour in story-lines.

The editorials always leave me thinking; the stories too often leave me groping through pastel fragments for a little substance. In future issues I hope to see more stories that can stand up to rough handling. More extrapolation, less hallucination. More vision, less fog.

Despite these carpings, I'm happy to congratulate *Interzone* on two years of steady production, hard work, sincerity, and daring. The cadre has shrunk to a core of battle-hardened veterans: best of luck to the Radical Post-Electronic Literary Guerillas.

Bruce Sterling
Austin, Texas

Dear Editors:
May I take further the issues raised by Sue Thomason in *Interzone* 9, and do so by first looking at some of the content of that number?

In its first story we sense the stench of purines in smeared excrement; in

the second we encounter the patchy-haired and bandaged disease bringers; the third story has the title "Canned Goods." Richard Kadrey, introducing his black and white portfolio, tells us that his favourite colour is bilious. Of the many powerful similes in M. John Harrison's story perhaps the most memorable occurs when Verdigris, slipping her hand into the wicker cage, "like a woman gutting fish on a cold Wednesday morning at Louth, opened the corpse from diaphragm to groin." She then buries her arms to the elbows in it, creating a filthy smell. Equally memorable from William Gibson's story is the persistent cloud of flies on the woman's cadaver, below the hovering "pall of greasy cooking smoke." The dominant haunting figure in "Spiral Winds" is the carcass's "waxpaper husk," that sitting "hollow-eyed corpse, with the ants busy between its teeth."

This selection of bizarre and slightly queasy indicators is not intended as wholly representative of the pieces from which they are culled; but in their total context they do somewhat support Sue Thomason's strictures and grounds for distaste. By total context I mean that just as a musical composition is "coloured" by key signature and recurring motifs, so do these phrases and images indicate something of the "colour" of the writings in which they occur, and collectively something of the "colour" of *Interzone*.

Taken individually the stories in *IZ* 9, in my estimation, range from the brilliant (the Ballard) to the neat but merely jokey (the Disch); and they cover a spectrum of styles from the masterly (Garry Kilworth) to the fragmented (William Gibson). Together they amount to an *IZ* number which is distinguished and distinctive — but distinctive for putting no positive accent on all that Sue Thomason and Abigail Frost would consider to be life-affirming. Richard Kadrey's cover collage (in conception the best cover yet) is appropriate to its content. The dissected and annotated brain is a reductionist vision of the flowering of mind and spirit; it looks down on the pointless cycling of life within a darkling universe — and is at the same time itself conditioned and imprisoned by it. I am reminded a little of a sentence of R.D. Laing (quoted by David Martin in Maurice Cranston's symposium *The New Left*): "We who are half alive in the often fibrillating heartland of a senescent capitalism. . . can do no more than sing our sad songs of disillusion and defeat."

It is a fair enough editorial statement you make — that if stories of quality arise only out of the perception and consequent expression of a dehumanising culture, this must determine publishing practice. I can't, however, believe such to be exclusively the case. "The Tithonian Factor," "The Unconquered Country," "The Ur-Plant," "Overture for a Midsummer Night's Dream" all pointed in other directions; but the diverse insights and emphases they represent are in the context of *IZ*'s output as a whole crowded out by the limiting perceptions achieved by concentration on "the muddy vesture of decay."

K.V. Bailey
Alderney

Dear Editors:
Criminally poor letter-writer I may be, but Sue Thomason's letter (*IZ* 9) contained things that I just can't let go unanswered. Colin Greenland's reply helped a little, but the main thrust of his argument seemed to be to deflect the criticism from the magazine towards its contributors. As an amateur (so far) author, I've seized the chance of arrogantly leaping in and making sweeping statements about the field as a whole (well I tried writing this letter speaking just for myself, but I eventually I gave up and decided it couldn't be done).

Sue complains not enough modern stories are "life-affirming." As pure description, maybe that's so, but as criticism? Writers can't deliver sermons from mountains, and writers don't exist in a vacuum. Truth to tell they're poor pitiable human creatures, just a little more articulate than the rest. And it follows that all they're capable of doing is reflecting the world around them.

So what am I supposed to write about? Enchanted gardens? Far as I can remember, they were all dug up to get at the North Sea Oil years ago. The Summer of Love? I'm 18. All I can remember is the Winter of Discontent. That's just what I see in the paper or out the window. Writing about fluffy white bunnies would make me a liar.

Sue as good as admits this herself when she says "I get more than I can stand of despondency in real life." She goes on: "*IZ* feels like the literature of a dehumanized, decaying, disintegrating culture." And so it is. What are we actually arguing about, then? I feel it's this: "The natural reaction of this healthy organism is to withdraw from pain." In other words, stick your head in the sand. Ignore it and it will go away. We've been acting out that Mary Whitehouse attitude for years now, and it should be obvious even to Sue that it's only made things worse.

In the words of that perverse, sadistic, modernist engineer of a despondent culture, William Wordsworth: "The eye it cannot choose but see/We cannot bid the ear be still." The only way to solve problems is to open your eyes and face your trouble head-on. No problem was ever solved by people who refused to admit it existed. And pseudo-hippy, hole-in-my-shoe bullshit the likes of "I love the land, I delight in the flowering redcurrant bush outside my window" can only have one effect.

It makes this "healthy organism" puke.

Peace and love (or should that be "blood and bombs".

G.C. Burrows,
Milton Keynes

Dear Editors:
The stories in issue 9 prompt me to wonder whether, in fact, it is possible to write a "modern" short story any more. Print simply is not modern. Rock videos are modern. Dyslexia is modern. Dumb videogames are modern. An aversion to sequential, logical thought is modern. "Right brain" rather than "left brain" is modern (to use the current Californian jargon, which is as common now as "paranoid" was in the late 1960s).

In other words, you are trying to create new art in a form which is antique. I find it deplorable that fiction should now seem such an anachronism, but there it is. Modern tastes (at least in this continent) have diverged from your (and my) way of looking at, and thinking about, the world. Hence, no matter who you publish and how hard you try, it seems to me that *Interzone* is doomed to seem quaint, so long as it deals in orthodox short fiction. Even Ballard's "condensed novels" of the late 1960s would not seem truly modern today — though more modern than conventional narrative.

Ballard's story, Aldiss's story, Disch's story, and Harrison's, could all have been written and published twenty years ago. This does not mean they are bad stories; simply that they are hardly at the "cutting edge" (whatever that really means). I don't pretend to have any answers myself; I seem doomed to write text in various forms for the rest of my life. At the same time, I am increasingly, uncomfortably aware that my audience is growing old with me. The science-fiction field is the only one for which I have figures; those figures are disheartening. Polls conducted by *Fantasy and Science Fiction* and by *Locus* magazine show, without any doubt, that the readerships are aging at the same rate as the publications. The proportion of teenage readers is now virtually ZERO. Maybe *Interzone* fares better; I hope so.

Charles Platt
New York

Editorial Reply:
You are a glum fellow, Charles. Of course Interzone *has teenage readers (see the preceding letter from an 18-year-old). It would not be worth carrying on if we didn't have them — though that's not to say we conceive of* IZ *as a "juvenile" magazine. To the best of our knowledge, our youngest subscriber is*

just 13 years old — which means he was born in 1971, over a year after the last monthly New Worlds *appeared! We'd appreciate hearing from more of our readers who happen to be in their teens or early twenties: what are your responses to the points made by the elderly Mr Platt?* (DP)

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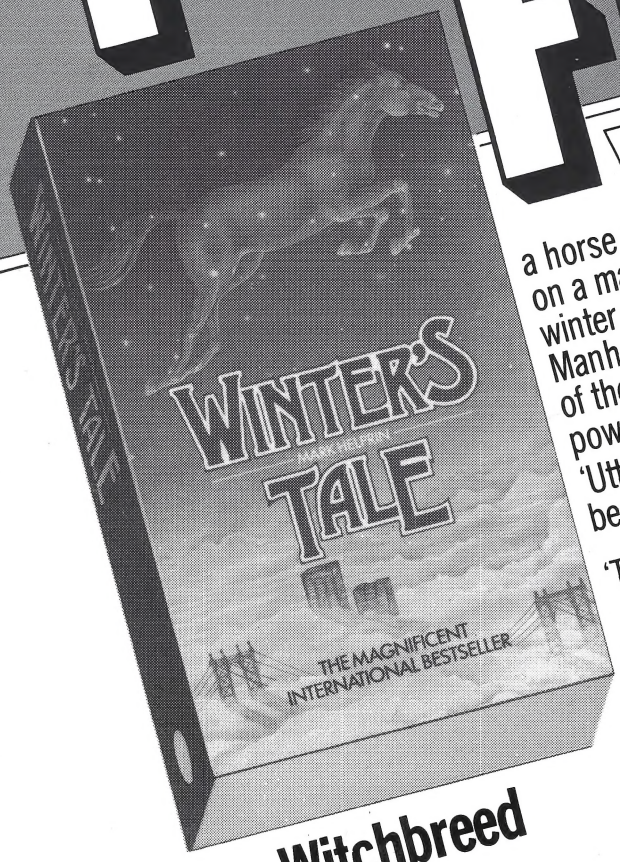

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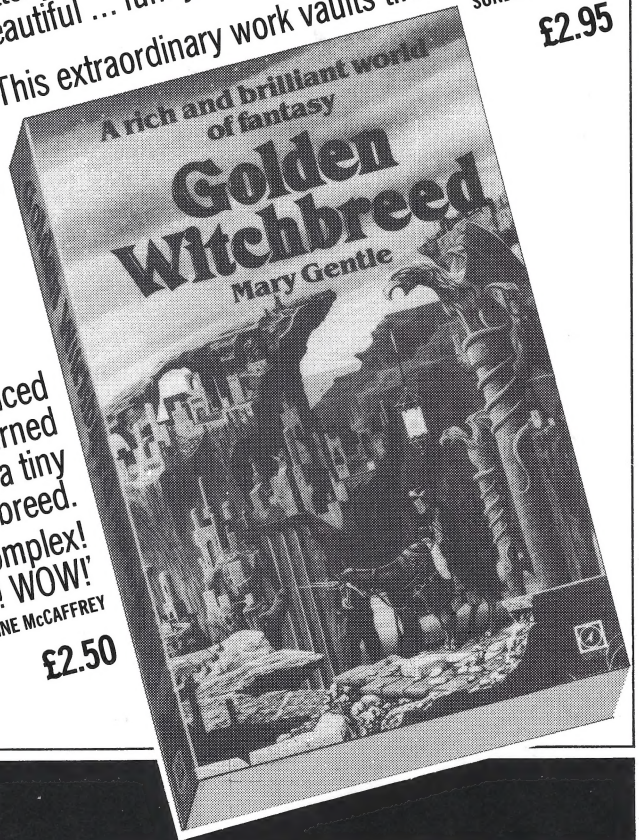

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